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Tautphoenus



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BRITISH AUTHORS.
VOL. CCCCXXIX.

QUITS BY THE BARONESS TAUTPHOEUS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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Q U I T S;

A NOVEL.

BY

THE BARONESS TAUTPHOEUS,

AUTHOR OF "THE INITIALS."

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1858.

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CONTENTS

OF VOLUME II.

	Page
CHAPTER I. Ways and Means	1
— II. A Rustic Studio	21
— III. Treats of Marriage and other Matters	34
— IV. Jack's First Exploit	56
— V. The Wild Alp	68
— VI. The Forester's Bridge	84
— VII. A Modern Idyl	108
— VIII. Post Horses bring the Idyl to a Conclusion	119
— IX. The "Big Sausage"	140
— X. Alpenrosen	152
— XI. The old Char-à-banc	160
— XII. Pastime for a Rainy Day	182
— XIII. The Vow	198
— XIV. Woodmen at Work	221
— XV. Quits!	235
— XVI. Pastoral Pleasures	249
— XVII. Treats of different Kinds of Love	261
— XVIII. A Huntress with two Strings to her Bow	277
— XIX. On Guard	294
— XX. Jack's Last Exploit	304
— XXI. The Break-up	322
— XXII. Who Wins the Wager?	331

APPENDIX

OF THE

1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4
5	5	5	5
6	6	6	6
7	7	7	7
8	8	8	8
9	9	9	9
10	10	10	10
11	11	11	11
12	12	12	12
13	13	13	13
14	14	14	14
15	15	15	15
16	16	16	16
17	17	17	17
18	18	18	18
19	19	19	19
20	20	20	20
21	21	21	21
22	22	22	22
23	23	23	23
24	24	24	24
25	25	25	25
26	26	26	26
27	27	27	27
28	28	28	28
29	29	29	29
30	30	30	30
31	31	31	31
32	32	32	32
33	33	33	33
34	34	34	34
35	35	35	35
36	36	36	36
37	37	37	37
38	38	38	38
39	39	39	39
40	40	40	40
41	41	41	41
42	42	42	42
43	43	43	43
44	44	44	44
45	45	45	45
46	46	46	46
47	47	47	47
48	48	48	48
49	49	49	49
50	50	50	50
51	51	51	51
52	52	52	52
53	53	53	53
54	54	54	54
55	55	55	55
56	56	56	56
57	57	57	57
58	58	58	58
59	59	59	59
60	60	60	60
61	61	61	61
62	62	62	62
63	63	63	63
64	64	64	64
65	65	65	65
66	66	66	66
67	67	67	67
68	68	68	68
69	69	69	69
70	70	70	70
71	71	71	71
72	72	72	72
73	73	73	73
74	74	74	74
75	75	75	75
76	76	76	76
77	77	77	77
78	78	78	78
79	79	79	79
80	80	80	80
81	81	81	81
82	82	82	82
83	83	83	83
84	84	84	84
85	85	85	85
86	86	86	86
87	87	87	87
88	88	88	88
89	89	89	89
90	90	90	90
91	91	91	91
92	92	92	92
93	93	93	93
94	94	94	94
95	95	95	95
96	96	96	96
97	97	97	97
98	98	98	98
99	99	99	99
100	100	100	100

Q U I T S !

VOL. II.

CHAPTER I.

Ways and Means.

NORA returned to the forester's house at an unusually early hour the next evening, having been requested by Rosel to act as mediatrix, if necessary, between her father and the Crag peasant, should any difference arise in their proposed arrangements. She found both families assembled in the little parlour, well supplied with beer, bread, and tobacco, Rosel seated somewhat apart, apparently occupied with her spinning-wheel, but looking very anxious and flushed.

Nora's arrival as inmate of the house caused neither surprise nor embarrassment; they all knew her, some had even learned to pronounce her name from the servants at the inn, and greeted her as "Mees Nora," and Franz and Seppel stumbled against each other in their eagerness to hand her a chair; but after she had drawn from her pocket a piece of crochet-work and bent over it, they immediately resumed their places and the conversation as if no interruption had occurred.

The Crag peasant had a packet of yellow-looking papers in an old leather case before him, and Franz, apparently acting as secretary, sat, pen in hand, prepared to draw up any agreement into which they might enter.

"It was in the year twenty," said the peasant, adjusting his spectacles on the end of his nose, "in the year twenty that I entered into possession of the Craggs, and, according to contract, agreed to give my parents yearly as follows." He opened one of the papers and read slowly —

1 bushel of wheat,
2 ditto rye,
1 peck of barley,
18 lbs. of butter,
100 eggs,
25 lbs. of meat,
6 lbs. of linseed oil,
12 lbs. of flax,

"One quarter of the orchard fruit; cabbage, potatoes, and turnips as required; a quart of milk daily; wood for fuel, and the necessary repairs of the off house; a pair of shoes and a pair of slippers annually; and twenty florins a-year, paid quarterly."

"That's all fair," observed the forester, with a nod of approbation. "The ground about the Craggs is good, and there is no mortgage on it, I believe?"

"No mortgage," repeated the peasant, "and therefore I expect you will make no difficulty about the provision for Anderl. The young lady there has, perhaps, told you that I expect two thousand florins for him."

"You must be satisfied with half the sum," said the forester, decidedly, "or — we shall never come to terms. I am not a rich man, but my daughter will not go ill provided into your house. Besides her bed and her spinning-wheel, her clothes and house-linen, she shall have one thousand florins on the day of her marriage,

and perhaps the same sum after my death; but more than this I cannot give her."

"Then, neighbour," said the peasant, doggedly, "there is no use in talking longer about this matter, unless you choose Seppel to raise the money on mortgage, which, however, *I* cannot take upon me to recommend."

"No," cried the forester, pushing his chair backwards, "no; I know too well that such a beginning would lead to ruin. I cannot allow my daughter, and you cannot advise your son, to commence housekeeping with a debt they may never be able to pay off."

"I don't advise," said the old man, with a peculiarly artful smile; "I said if you chose. It all rests with you. Seppel, in his wish to possess the Crag and marry Rosel, is ready to agree to anything, though I have counted over and over the income and expenditure, and proved to him that a few florins at the end of the year is all he can expect to put aside, and may be thankful, when he has a family, if he can keep clear of debt. Oh no! I don't advise! I leave everything to you!"

"Come, come, Crag," said the forester, smiling, "we all know your love of contradiction, but this is going too far. People say you have managed to save money, and I suppose your son can do the same."

"My savings are said to be more considerable than they really are," observed the peasant. "After thirty years' management of the Crag, I have, it is true, contrived to scrape together a few hundred florins, but it is only since my sons could help in the work, and corn and cattle have risen in price. The house is now in want of repair."

"Well," said the forester, "there is no denying you might have kept it in better order."

"What for?" asked the peasant. "May be that it might look handsomer when seen from the off house after I had resigned. No, no, forester, you don't know me yet!"

"I believe that's true," said Franz, who had latterly been biting the end of his pen, as he sat with his eyes fixed on the peasant. "My father is upright and honest, and speaks his mind, but the devil himself could hardly make out what you're at now. Perhaps you're not willing to resign. If that's it, say so; there's nobody has a right to compel you."

"I'm willing enough to resign," he answered, slowly. "After labouring ten years for my father and thirty for myself, I've had enough. And what with the rheumatism and my goitre, and the wish of my old woman to see her Seppel married, I'm at times more than willing; but knowing the income and expenditure, I can't advise the burdening of the land with a debt, and see no way for the young people but your coming forward with the money."

"I can't give what I haven't got," began the forester, angrily; but an appealing look from the two women opposite him, and a glance at Rosel's dismayed face, seemed to appease him. "Let us go a little more into detail," he added, quietly, "and see how matters stand. Perhaps you have got your last year's account, and from it we can make an estimate."

Seppel came forward noiselessly, and added one to the eager faces around the table, as the peasant drew from his pocket a large sheet of paper covered with sprawling writing and figures, and, as if he had been

prepared for the request, read without comment an account of his outlay and income during the preceding year, which, being drawn up in a rather confused style, was listened to with but the more intense attention by all his auditors.

When he had ended, no one seemed inclined to speak, and as he laid the paper on the table, and took off his spectacles, he observed composedly, "After deducting the taxes and parish rates from the overplus, the remainder, I take it, will prove somewhat less than was expected!"

Old Craggs rubbed his chin and mouth very diligently for a few seconds, Nora almost thought to hide a smile of satisfaction at the dismay he had caused, and then began to fold up his papers, and replace them in the leather case.

"The value of your property has been greatly over-rated," said the forester.

"That's not my fault," answered the peasant, "the truth might have been known any day for the asking. I thought you had lived long enough in the mountains to know that the soil so high up is not always of the best description."

"I know you grow wheat every year," rejoined the forester.

"Well, I don't deny that worse land might be found in the parish than at the Craggs," said the peasant; "I don't complain. If I'm not rich, I can at least say that no one ever felt want in my house. There's always enough to eat, and something to spare for a stray guest; my servants are paid regularly, and get their shoes, jackets, linen, and harvest-money at the time appointed. We don't work on holidays at the Craggs,

and keep our church festival in a becoming manner, and I have always been a contented man, and so was my father before me, and his father before him, and Seppel can live as we have done, and is willing if you'll consent to raise the second thousand on the land. I dare say you'll pay the interest during your life time, and in your will make all straight again."

"No," said the forester, rising, "I cannot consent to this arrangement. You seem to forget that I have two children, and whether or not I may live to save another thousand florins, God only knows. My eldest son fell by the hand of a wildschütz, and such may be my fate any day in the year — there are enough of them in our neighbourhood" — here he glanced for a moment towards Seppel, and amended his speech, by adding, — "from Tyrol I mean — and I shall never rest until I have hunted them all down. Now with regard to this money, you see I can do nothing, and promise nothing. My daughter has not been daintily brought up; she is willing and able to work, and can live at the Crag as others have done. It is hard enough that her fortune is taken from her before she enters into possession, as I may say, and given to Anderl; but as to her commencing with a loan, and having to pay interest for it, perhaps as long as she lives, that is out of the question, and there is nothing more to be said if *you* will not do something handsome for them."

"I can neither do nor say anything more," observed the peasant, closing his leather case, and dropping it into one of the pockets of a grass green coat, that seemed to have been inherited from his father or grandfather, the waist being formed by two large buttons placed al-

most between his shoulders, the remainder of the garment sweeping the floor at each side of his chair, when seated, and hanging down to his heels when he stood up. "I have two children, as well as you, forester," he added, "and I do not see why one should get all, and the other next to nothing."

"But the 'all' is not much," interposed the forester's wife, "Seppel and Rosel will have enough to live upon, and no more. A thousand florins with what you will give him from your savings, and a home at the Crag, when he chooses to stay there, is surely enough for Anderl."

"Do you suppose," said the peasant, angrily, "that my Anderl is likely to be a day-labourer at the Crag, or to turn wood-cleaver, or charcoal-burner on the mountains here under your husband? We have other plans for him, as the young lady there might have told you, and he shall not come short, let what will happen, for it is only lately that my wife has made me give up my intention of resigning to Anderl instead of Seppel."

"Ah — ah!" cried the forester, with a look of intelligence, "is that your drift? — then indeed there is no chance of our coming to terms. Rosel," he said, turning to his daughter, "you see that no ill-will on my part against Seppel stands between you and your happiness. You know that I cannot do more than I offered just now, and after hearing that the income at the Crag, even in good years, so very little exceeds the expenditure, you must be convinced that I am right in refusing my consent to the proposed mortgage."

"Of course, father — of course you know best," faltered Rosel, "but — but I cannot give up Seppel!" One

hand wiped the tears from her eyes, the other she extended frankly to her lover.

Nora, who had followed attentively the calculations of the peasant, and listened to the discussion that had preceded and followed it with the deepest interest, now rose, and laying her hand gently on Rosel's shoulder said, "I can be of use here, or rather we can be of use to each other, Rosel. You know," she added, turning to the forester, "that I have come to Almenau to erect a tombstone on the grave of a very near relation in the churchyard here. I want some one to take charge of this grave, to plant flowers on it in summer, and decorate it with wreaths during the winter, and consider a thousand florins by no means too much for this purpose. Rosel shall receive the money from me any day you appoint, on condition that Seppel promises for himself, and imposes as a duty on all future possessors of the Crag, to attend to this grave in the manner I have described."

Great was the surprise and delight caused by this speech, the old Crag peasant alone appearing more astonished than pleased. Rosel seized Nora's hand, and stared at her in speechless happiness; the forester bowed repeatedly, and said the proposal was munificent, the engagement should be contracted formally, and an agreement concerning the grave drawn up, signed, sealed, and delivered into her hands; Seppel standing before her erect, as if about to present arms, first thanked, and then assured her she had not misplaced her generosity, and that no grave in the parish should be better attended to than that of her relation.

The forester's wife and Seppel's mother were loud in their expressions of gratitude, but no entreaties could

prevail on the Crag peasant to resume his seat, in order to drink another glass of beer, and wish the young people a speedy and merry wedding.

"Time enough — time enough," he said testily, drawing a black silk night-cap over his head, and taking up his hat, "time enough when the day of betrothal comes."

"But," said the forester, "I hope you'll go to the town, and ask the judge to name a day next week for the drawing up of the surrender and marriage contract; and when all is in order, we'll have a little merry-making here, and I dare say Mees Nora won't disdain to join us, or Count Waldemar either."

"I'm not going into the town till Wednesday," said the peasant, peevishly.

"Well, Wednesday is not long off," observed the forester, good-humouredly, "we're not going to be unreasonable; and if Seppel sows the winter corn on his own account this year at the Crag it's all we want, or expect."

Nora had found an opportunity of leaving the room unperceived, and it was evident that the peasant had been put into a more congenial humour afterwards, for as he passed beneath the balcony on which she was standing, when he left the house, she heard him talking and laughing as gaily as the forester and his family, who all accompanied him as he turned into the pathway leading to the Crag.

While Nora looked after the noisy happy party, her mind was so occupied with kind sympathy, and generous plans for future benefits to be conferred on Rosel, that she was unconscious of the approach of Waldemar and Torp, who, having fished with tolerable success in the trout

streams near the village, now turned to the forester's house, to inquire about their chance of sport the ensuing day, should they go out deer-stalking.

Waldemar loitered and looked round him, Torp strode quickly forward, for, like most Englishmen, he made a business even of pleasure, and with the most unceasing perseverance fished and hunted alternately, pursuing his sports with an intentness and eagerness that not unfrequently made him overlook the beauties of the country about him, or caused him to consider many of them as mere impediments, which, when overcome, would serve to enhance in his own and others' eyes the triumph of success.

While Waldemar, with head uncovered and upturned smiling face, addressed Nora, and induced her to lean over the balcony to answer him, Torp, scarcely glancing toward her, merely touched his hat, and stalked into the house. He was still employed questioning the stupid old woman, who was rinsing beer glasses in the kitchen, as to the time when the forester was expected home, when he heard his friend enter the adjacent passage and bound up the stairs three or four steps at a time. It was in vain he cleared his throat, coughed significantly, and finally called to him. Waldemar either did not or would not hear, and Torp, with an impatient shrug of his shoulders, entered the little sitting-room, and naturally turned to the gun-rack as the object most likely to interest him while awaiting the return of the forester or his son. In order to gain a nearer view of the rifles and fowling-pieces, he pushed aside with his foot a spinning-wheel, and on the floor where it had stood perceived a small patent pocket-book, firmly closed with patent pencil. He picked it up, examined it for a moment, and though

there was no name or initial on the green morocco cover — no engraving on the pale amethyst that decorated the top of the pencil — he knew that it could only belong to Nora Nixon, and therefore pitched it carelessly on the nearest window-stool. This would not be worth recording, had he not afterwards occasionally interrupted his inspection of the fire-arms in order to glance towards the neat little book, and ended by once more taking it up, and then deliberately walking out of the room.

Restoring it to its owner would, he thought, serve to interrupt a *tête-à-tête* that had already lasted long enough; yet he hesitated, and hardly knew how to put his plan in execution, when, on reaching the lobby, he caught a glimpse of Waldemar through the door that opened on the balcony. He was sitting on a wooden bench with Nora, bending forwards, and explaining the last drawings he had made in his sketch-book, which was spread open between them. The noise of the stream before the house prevented Torp from hearing what Waldemar said, when, pointing to some spot on the paper, he observed, "It was somewhere here that Torp shot the black cock yesterday morning, and with a rifle too! He is a capital shot with a bullet, and hunts with a patience and perseverance that is at times quite incomprehensible to me. I like deer-stalking as well as most sportsmen, and will climb, and creep, and crawl as long as any one; but to stand for hours waiting for a shot, either in the twilight or moonlight, is a thing I can't endure, so I generally leave him with the forester or Franz, and take refuge in the nearest hut. We were last night on this alp, the highest about here; in fact, it can only be used in the heat of summer, and the cattle are to leave it in a day or two; but the

view from it is magnificent, and will well repay you for the trouble of mounting."

"Do you think I could undertake such a walk?" asked Nora. "Your drawing gives me the idea of a very wild place."

"It *is* a wild place, and is called the Wild Alp," answered Waldemar; "but I have taken it into my head that you can not only walk but also climb well, and that difficulties would not easily discourage you."

Nora smiled.

"We have had such remarkably fine weather lately," he continued, "that I may safely recommend you to undertake the excursion; one day's rain, however, would make part of the way impracticable for a lady, on account of the cows' stockings."

"Cows' stockings?" repeated Nora, interrogatively.

"I mean holes in the swampy ground which have been made by the passage of cattle in wet weather, when they follow each other in single file, stepping regularly into these holes, then filled with water, and carefully avoiding the more solid mud around them. After a succession of footbaths of this description, you may imagine the appearance of the cows."

"I can," said Nora, interrupting him with a laugh, "and understand your hint so well that I shall certainly choose dry weather for an expedition to the Wild Alp."

"Why not make it to-morrow," rejoined Waldemar, eagerly, "and let me accompany you?"

"If I could persuade Jack," began Nora.

"Oh, never mind him!" cried Waldemar. "Take Rosel with you, who can make herself useful, and carry a basket of provisions. You don't mind getting up at daybreak, I hope?"

"Not at all, and you tempt me so strongly that I really must endeavour to make arrangements, with both Jack and Rosel, to start at four o'clock to-morrow morning. I suppose that is early enough?"

"If Monsieur Jaques go with you," said Waldemar, "you might as well make a two days' tour, and go on to the Kerbstein lake." He placed a sketch before her, in which high mountains enclosed an apparently more deep than extensive sheet of water; towards the foreground some remarkably jagged rock impeded a stream that flowed from it, forming long low cascades; and in a sheltered nook, the probable opening into a narrow valley, stood a solitary chalet built half of stone and half of wood, fishing-nets pending from the balcony, and a couple of roughly made boats so near that Nora scarcely required the explanation given when he added, "That's the Kerbstein fisherman's house, where you could remain the night; Torp has already spent a day there, and says the people are uncommonly civil; by-the-by, he might go with us — or meet us at the lake — or something?"

"No, thank you," said Torp, who had reached the door to the balcony a couple of minutes previously, and now stood leaning against it. "You seem to have quite forgotten that if we do not hunt to-morrow you proposed going to Saint Hubert's chapel, and afterwards across the mountains into Tyrol. I know you are expected at Herrenburg."

These last words were uttered with much meaning, and seemed to cause some annoyance to Waldemar.

"I have fixed no time for my return home, Torp," he answered, a little impatiently, "and having been accepted as guide to the Wild Alp by Mees Nora, you

must excuse my leaving you either to hunt with Franz, or inspect the ancient altar at Saint Hubert's without me."

"I cannot allow you to break an engagement on my account," said Nora, "for if I want a guide one can easily be found in the village. In fact, the painter Florian has already offered his services through our landlady, and I ought to have gone to see him and his mother long ago, as it was at their relation's house I was so hospitably received at Ammergau." She spoke without looking at Torp, for she was vexed that, having heard her ready acceptance of Waldemar's offer, he had not also been made aware of her intention to decline his being invited to join their party: she felt, too, some natural irritation at his thinking it necessary to defend his friend from the imaginary danger of her society, and not a little increase of indignation at his interference on all occasions.

"Am I to understand that you have changed your mind, and will not accept my escort?" asked Waldemar, rising.

"Precisely," answered Nora. "I shall defer my excursion to the Wild Alp until next week, and spend tomorrow in the village. That old castle on the hill deserves a visit, and when there I can amuse myself rebuilding the edifice in imagination — it will not be difficult, as they say it was inhabited towards the end of the last century."

"So!" cried Waldemar gaily. "So you build castles in the air occasionally?"

"Rather say continually," replied Nora, laughing; "for since I entered the Bavarian highlands every hill has been supplied with a castle, and every dale with a cottage!"

"And have you peopled your castles and cottages?" asked Waldemar.

"N—o," answered Nora, and a sudden melancholy overspread her features, for the light question had brought strongly to her recollection her depressingly isolated position. Of the few near relations left her, was there one she could ask to live in a German cot or castle with her? Her uncle's treasure was in London, and with it his heart; Georgina would call such a residence being buried alive; Jack was a mere boy, full of youthful frolic, with a decided inclination to enjoy the world and its pleasures to the utmost; his brother Samuel she scarcely knew, and friends she had none! Yes — one — Irene Schaumburg; but what changes might not a ten years' separation have produced in her regard! These thoughts had but flashed through her mind, however, when Waldemar, surprised by her seriousness, said, with a mixture of curiosity and interest,

"Not peopled! not swarming with English friends and relations!"

Nora shook her head.

"So much the better," he said, reseating himself on the wooden bench beside her, and nodding a laughing defiance to Torp, — "so much the better; there will be the more room for Bavarians and Tyroleans! You really must allow me, Mees Nora, to accompany you to this ruin to-morrow; I know something of architecture, and we can build and plan together in the most satisfactory manner imaginable. Now don't refuse, or I shall think it time to be offended."

"I cannot well refuse," answered Nora, smiling, "seeing that the ruins of Waltenburg are quite as much at your service as mine."

“And you will permit me to go there with you, or,” — he added, correcting himself, — “to be there at the same time that you are?”

“Of course,” said Nora, as she rose from her lowly seat. “Until the castle is mine, I cannot raise the draw-bridge, and refuse you entrance.” When passing Torp, who stood in the doorway, she perceived her pocket-book in his hand.

“This is yours,” he said, coldly handing it to her; “I found it on the floor in the room below stairs.”

“It is mine — thank you,” said Nora, and a so unwonted colour spread over her face as she received it, that Waldemar’s attention was instantly attracted.

“I wish,” he said, “that I had found your book; it evidently contains secrets, and you fear that Torp, in looking for the owner’s name inside, may have discovered —”

“I have no fears of the kind,” said Nora, interrupting him. “Nothing, I am sure, would have induced Mr. Torp to open this book or read a line of its contents. If he had not known it to be mine, he would have left it in the parlour.”

Torp seemed to consider even a word of assurance unnecessary.

“You do not deny that there are secrets in it, Mees Nora,” persisted Waldemar, “and I would give much to possess it. See, here are my sketches of Ammergau; you have more than once said you wished to possess them. Let us make an exchange — they are yours for the note book!”

Nora thought over the contents of her little green book, and then dropped it into her pocket. Secrets such as Waldemar perhaps expected to find in it there were

none. She had got the habit, during her solitary hours in Russell-square, of taking notes when reading, of writing lists of books, short critiques of those just read, and other matters of an equally unimportant description. A box full of such small volumes had been left in Mrs. Ducker's care in England, and any of them, or many of them, she would, without hesitation, have given for the tempting sketches now offered her; but the little green book in question unfortunately contained in its side pocket the letter that Charles Thorpe had written to her uncle ten years previously, and a few memoranda, which, if shown to Torp by Waldemar, would inevitably lead to explanations that she by no means desired.

"I am sorry I cannot make the exchange you propose," she said, turning away; "I wish these sketches had some other price."

"Stay," cried Waldemar, springing after her to the head of the staircase, "listen to me, Mees Nora — the sketches *have* another price; they shall be yours for — for — a cup of coffee made by you yourself for *me* — any day you please on any of the alps about here."

"A cup of coffee!" repeated Nora, incredulously, "You shall have a dozen, if you desire it."

"I shall remind you of this agreement," said Waldemar.

"You need not," she answered, laughing, "I shall take care not to let you forget it."

Waldemar could scarcely wait until she was out of hearing before he exclaimed, "You see, Torp, I shall win the wager."

"Perhaps you may," he answered, dryly; "that you will make a fool of yourself, is, however, even more certain, and I greatly fear that your father will think that I led you into temptation."

"Pshaw!" cried Waldemar, impatiently. "I acknowledge that I am considerably *épris* with this black-eyed nymph of the Thames; but I could go to Herrenburg to-morrow, and in a week — or — let us say a fortnight, I could forget her — yes, I think I could forget her in a fortnight or three weeks."

"Then go," said Torp, earnestly, "go while the effort is easily made, and you will spare yourself and your family a world of annoyance. I have made the inquiries about these Nixons that you desired, and heard to-day, from a friend of mine who knows everybody in London, that this man has undoubtedly a large fortune, but also a large family; there are sons in Australia and elsewhere, one a lawyer in London, and the interesting youth now here, called Jack. The eldest daughter is well known in town from being constantly with the Savage Waywards, the younger my friend cannot well remember, he believes she has resided chiefly in the country; some people supposed her consumptive, others said she was eccentric, and many now assert she is dead. We know that she is neither dead nor consumptive, but I think the word eccentric may be used when describing her. At all events, according to the letter, the young ladies may 'be worth' about twenty thousand pounds a-piece!"

"It is the connexion and not the fortune I wanted to hear about," said Waldemar, with a look of annoyance.

"My informant," continued Torp, "could not give me much more information on that subject than I gave you at Ammergau. The founder of the family, according to the legend, was a peasant boy, who wandered to London in the Whittington fashion, and afterwards made a fortune in trade. This is an old story, and a con-

venient one for finding arms when they become necessary; whether true or not is of little importance, for though love might manage to blind you, your father would certainly put on his spectacles when examining the genealogy of the Nixons, and nothing but the most enormous fortune would induce him to overlook its defects. Perhaps, after saying so much, I ought to add, that one of this family married a relation of ours many years ago."

"Ah!" said Waldemar, "such marriages cause no commotion in an English family!"

"The lady was a widow, and perfectly at liberty," answered Torp; "so though my father greatly disapproved, and indeed opposed the marriage, which turned out even worse than he expected, he could not prevent it. I have spoken to little purpose, Waldemar, if it has not yet become evident to you that one of this family is no match for a Bendorff of Herrenburg, who has every chance of succeeding to a principality and becoming a Serene Highness in the course of time."

"That's it," cried Waldemar, "that chance is what makes my father so hard to please. I hope your succession to an English earldom has served to hamper you in the same way."

"I have not thought much about the matter as far as concerns myself," answered Torp, "but my brother gave me much trouble about ten years ago, when I was obliged strenuously to oppose his making a disagreeable match of this kind. Oddly enough, he added, "it was one of these Nixons, the daughter of that relative of ours of whom I spoke just now, that he took it into his head to marry. The very name of this family is odious to me ever since, for though Medway yielded to my re-

monstrances in the end, we quarrelled a whole year about the matter. Do not expect me, however, to make the same efforts for you, Waldemar; but I am ready and willing to leave Almenau to-morrow, and share your flight from this nymph of the Thames as you call her."

"No, Torp, I ask no such sacrifice. You are right; I shall order horses for to-morrow morning, and leave without again seeing Mees Nora. In four-and-twenty hours, my friend, I shall be at Herrenburg, admiring the magnificent dress of Irene, Countess Schaumberg, and making grave inquiries about the education of my unruly little ward Adelheid."

"That's right!" said Torp, "I should not have thought a retreat so necessary if I had not seen plainly to-day what has happened to Falkner."

"There is no doubt how that affair will end," said Waldemar, laughing; "Ernst evidently hopes to persuade the other nymph to follow him into Hungary, and if he succeed, she will not be the first Englishwoman who has married into *our* regiment as we call it, from having so many relations among the officers. My brother tells me that two of his best friends have English wives, patterns of perfection by all accounts, women who stop at home and all that sort of thing; and I suspect it is the recollection of them that has made Falkner think of Mees Nixie. She is not ill-looking, however, far from it, but not to be compared to Nora — my Nora — our Nora! I wonder he did not choose Nora!"

"I wish he had," said Torp, "or rather I wish the whole family and their projected tombstone were in some other Bavarian village. After I have hunted on the Wild Alp you may expect me at Herrenburg, as I shall of course miss you greatly and find it dull here

without you. But go you must, Waldemar, and without delay, for I see plainly that this girl is just the sort of person likely to make you more desperately in love than you have ever yet been, and that is saying a good deal."

"Ah ha! Then you admit that she is charming?"

"She is dangerous," said Torp, "and — a — you will go to the Valley of the Inn to-morrow, old fellow, won't you?"

"I will," answered Waldemar, heroically.

CHAPTER II.

A Rustic Studio.

NORA was in the village at so early an hour the next morning that most of the inhabitants were at church, for it is there the Highland peasant commences both work and holiday, invoking a blessing alike on toil and pleasure. The sound of the wellplayed organ induced her to follow some dilatory labourers into the handsome edifice, which, with its showily decorated altar, was the pride of the parish. She saw her companions doff their battered straw hats, stroke down their hair on their forehead, and reverently kneel down, while bright beams of earliest sunshine, finding an entrance through the high narrow windows, passed over their rugged features, and directed her glance to other groups of men and women who, in remote corners or at side altars, forgetful of the presence of those around them, gave an outward expression to their devotion, both in feature and posture, which is said to be a peculiarity of southern nations, but seems common to all votaries of the Roman Catholic religion.

The service was soon over, the congregation, not having time to linger in or about the churchyard as on Sundays, dispersed at once, and Nora turned towards the not far distant house of Florian and his mother. It had a rather smarter air than the dwellings around it, had light green jalousies, and no trees in front, perhaps to prevent the passers-by from overlooking the shop-window at the left side of the entrance, which displayed a collection of heterogeneous articles, such as pipes, coarse cutlery, and writing materials, thread and tape of the most glaring colours, tobacco, twine, lidless boxes full of gigantic brass and steel thimbles, harlequin leather balls, silk kerchiefs, and samples of sugar, coffee, and liquorice.

The shop itself was a long narrow room, with a very town-like counter, behind which were shelves reaching to the ceiling well stored with printed cottons, woollen stuffs, and cloth; while on the opposite wall, placed conveniently within reach of customers, there were various implements of husbandry, fishing-tackle, wooden toys, and a great variety of straw and felt hats. Madame Cramer, a cheerful-looking little woman, dressed in a dark cotton gown by no means unfashionably made, and with partially grey hair neatly and becomingly braided, bent over the counter and asked Nora in what way she could serve her.

Nora requested to see some straw hats, but having, while looking at them, mentioned that she was the bearer of messages from Ammergau, Madame Cramer pushed them aside and began to speak of her relations and of her son, in amusing forgetfulness of her duties as shopkeeper. Nora was soon made aware that in Florian all her hopes and affections were centred; on him all

the money she and her husband had saved had been expended; her greatest sorrow in life had been parting with him, though but for a time. "For he went to study in Munich," she said, proudly, "and is an artist, and would have remained there until he had made himself renowned; but the old man died, and the village wanted a painter, so he came back, though with a heavy heart; and when we talked over matters together, and he told me what hundreds and hundreds of painters were in Munich, and how many more years he must study before he could hope to be what he intended, I could not help advising him to retain his father's privilege of being village painter, which afforded a good and creditable subsistence, and proposed spending all the ready money I possessed in building an addition to the house. Well, Miss, after some hesitation he consented, and for his sake I refused to marry the baker; and what with the building of his own *ately*, as he calls his workshop, and the repairs of altars in the churches, and the gildings, and the carvings, he was wonderfully contented for some time, but," she added with a sigh, "that did not last long, he could not take kindly to the other work —"

"What other work?" asked Nora.

"The house-painting and varnishing," she answered; "and I cannot blame him, for it is below him, as I may say, now that he is an artist, and paints so beautifully in the style of Michael Angely! You'll step up stairs I hope, Miss, and look at his cartoons?"

"I should like to see them very much," answered Nora; "but it is still so early, that I have time enough to look at your printed calicos, and choose one of

these straw hats for my mountain walks, before we disturb him."

The hat she chose was very coarse, very stiff, and bore a strong resemblance to a flattened extinguisher. She did not, to the great surprise of Madame Cramer, look in the small glass to see whether or not it were becoming; and when some ribbon was afterwards produced for her inspection, she merely said, "Black, if you please," and began an examination of the cottons and stuffs on the shelves behind the counter.

"I shall require some of these things before long," she observed, mounting the little ladder that enabled her to take a view of the contents of the upper shelf, "and then you must tell me the prices."

"If you would like to have the marks explained," said Madame Cramer, "I'm sure I have no objection. It will not be necessary to have a second price when dealing with you, but the peasants are so accustomed to haggle and bargain, that they would think themselves cheated if I did not reduce my demand; so I always ask a kreutzer or two more than I afterwards take, and then they go away satisfied with themselves and with me."

Nora was amused, and some time elapsed imperceptibly while she learned to keep shop. The mystic numbers and letters were made perfectly intelligible to her, and also, in some degree, the profits and losses of a village trader. She learned that peasants incurred debts quite as readily, and often as thoughtlessly, as people in other ranks of life; some but paid an old account in order to commence a new one; and her proposal to Madame Cramer to insist on ready-money payments in future was answered by a shake of the head, and an assurance that all her customers would desert her, and

go to one Hans Maier in the neighbouring town, who had injured her enough already by obliging her to keep many articles in her shop that remained long on hand.

Madame Cramer could not leave her shop, and Nora was conducted up stairs by a remarkably plain, red-haired, and very freckled girl, of the name of Vevey. She was the adopted daughter of Madame Cramer, and Nora, struck by her likeness to some one she had seen occasionally at the inn, asked her if she had any relation there.

"The sennerin on the landlord's alp is my sister," she answered, smiling, "and you have seen her perhaps every Sunday morning. I shall make her guess who spoke of her when I go to the alp to-morrow."

"Rather tell me at what hour you leave the village," said Nora, "for I should greatly like to go with you."

"When you please, miss; it is quite an easy path, and hardly two hours' walk."

"I must choose the latest hour possible," said Nora, "as I hope to induce some others to join us who are not very early risers."

Vevey now led the way along a short passage, tapped rather timidly at a door, and having obtained permission to enter, held it open for Nora to pass her, and then closed it, and withdrew so noiselessly, that Florian continued his occupation totally unconscious of the presence of a stranger. He was a pale, dark-haired, small man, with a perfectly picturesque beard, open shirt collar, and well-daubed linen blouse, and stood before a cast-iron cross intended for the churchyard. Though only painting it black to defend it from rust, his posture was that of an artist before his easel; and he seemed to encourage the delusion, by having

hung his pot of black paint on the thumb of his left hand, as if it had been a palette, stopping occasionally to look at the progress of his work, and turning his head from side to side in a manner that greatly amused Nora, until, on a nearer approach, she perceived that there was a small picture in the centre of the cross, which might be supposed to have caused the pantomime.

Nora's visits to artists' studios had been frequent enough in former times to make her acquainted with the almost unavoidable litter and disorder usual in such places, but anything like that around her now she had never beheld. Beside the usual casts of legs and arms in plaster of Paris, half finished pictures, sketches, palettes, brushes and colours, there were all the more ordinary requisites for house-painting. Window-frames were placed with portraits against the wall to dry, and near them a couple of small coffins of a bright blue colour, such as were usually placed *over* the graves of children in the churchyard. On shelves round the room there was a large collection of distemper colours in earthenware pots, and numerous filigree arabesque patterns for the decoration of the walls of rooms and ceilings, while angels with broken wings, saints with tarnished draperies, and various pieces of curiously carved wood still awaited repairs from the skilful hand of the village artist.

How long Meister Florian might have continued to advance and retire before the black cross, had he not been interrupted by Nora, it is hard to say. He started when she addressed him, made some apology for having supposed her Genoveva, and then, for her use, began to disencumber an old brown leather chair of its accu-

mulated lumber. Nora did not wait for the completion of this operation, but began at once to speak of Ammergau and his relations there, the great drama and the wood carvers.

Florian's embarrassment was at an end; he listened attentively, and answered eagerly. She spoke of Munich and his studies there, and asked to see some drawings. Willingly he brought his large portfolio, and exhibited a succession of copies in chalks from well-known busts and statues; but they bore testimony to more assiduity than talent. His attempts in oils were of the same description; and Nora saw that though he might in time, and with perseverance, become perhaps a good copyist, he was no genius struggling with adverse fate, as she had been somewhat romantically inclined to imagine him.

"I wonder you have not tried landscape painting," she observed, after having patiently listened to his complaints about the difficulty of getting people to sit for their portraits. "In such a country as this you could never be at a loss for studies, and mountains, lakes, and trees must submit to be sketched and painted how and when you please."

"I have not the slightest inclination for landscapes," he answered; "my ambition was to paint altar-pieces for churches, but I have never arrived at composing anything. Perhaps I have not studied enough, for even in portrait-painting I am often at a loss. The miller's Madeleine was the only person who ever sat as often and as long as I wished; but she has since said that I made a scare-crow of her, and that I required a whole morning to paint the mole on her throat; while Count Waldemar, as she expressed it, 'had her

down in his pocket-book in a quarter of an hour, as like as two peas, and no mole at all!"

"It is difficult to paint female portraits satisfactorily," observed Nora. "Women expect to be idealized, and to have their defects either concealed or altogether omitted."

"That mole is no defect," said Florian, "I think it beautiful."

Nora smiled, and observed that he seemed to have employment enough to put portrait-painting out of his head.

"I cannot complain," he answered, looking round his room, "there is employment enough — such as it is!"

"They told me at Ammergau," she added, "that the renovation of the altars at St. Hubert's had been confided to you, and that is by all accounts a very flattering distinction."

"True," said Florian, with heightened colour. "I get as much work of that kind as I can manage to do; but you see, mademoiselle, my mother is from Ammergau, and I have a sort of natural talent for wood carving. These old altars are crowded with figures in alto or basso relievo, and it is not every-one who can supply the lost or broken arms, legs, and even heads, so easily as I can."

"And," asked Nora, "has that never led you to suppose that as wood carver you might be more successful than as a painter?"

"Yes," he replied, with a sigh; "but wood carving is a common talent, both here and in Tyrol, and no one ever became rich or renowned by it!"

"Fortunately, thousands of people are very happy

without being either," said Nora, turning from him to examine the old altar, with its folding doors and figures about a foot high in alto relievo, representing the legend of Saint Hubert being converted to Christianity by seeing a crucifix on the head of the stag of which he had long been in pursuit. The interest she expressed in his careful and judicious reparations seemed greatly to gratify Florian, and he hoped, if she intended to visit the chapel of the sainted huntsman, it would be at the time when he also should be there.

"I may as well confess that I came here intending to propose some such arrangement," she answered; "but besides St. Hubert's I wish to see the Wild Alp, and the Kerbstein lake."

"Seppel will be a better guide to the lake," said Florian, "but to St. Hubert's or any of the alps about here, I can show you the way as well as — as — if I had been out with a rifle, and knew where a wildschütz was likely to find a welcome and breakfast in case of need."

"And have you never been out in the way you describe?" asked Nora archly, and not much fearing that the suspicion would give offence.

"No," he answered, "though I have little doubt that many would think more of me if I had. A man who cannot handle a rifle has a hard stand here; there is no end to the joking and laughing about him; even the women cannot spare their jibes, and are always making comparisons, and lauding the foresters to the skies! I have heard it said that in towns the soldiers are made much of by them; but in the villages about here the foresters are better off still — it is forester here, and forester there, and one never hears of anything else!"

Nora pretty well understood the drift of this speech, but she betrayed no consciousness, as she acknowledged having herself rather a predilection for foresters; their dress was so picturesque; their employments so manly; and they had all a certain ease of manner that was irresistibly pleasing.

"Ease of manner!" exclaimed Florian. "I dare say — and no wonder — they keep good company! All the noblemen and bureaucrats of the neighbourhood pay court to them for an occasional day's shooting; and their wives are civil to make sure of getting venison. Old General Falkner, who is as proud a man as can well be, makes no guest so welcome at St. Benedict's as the forester; the captain's first visit, when he comes home on leave of absence, is to the Forest-house; and even Count Waldemar himself, who speaks to me whenever and wherever we meet, has not a word if the forester be present, or his assistant only drop a hint about having seen a chamois or roe on the mountains!"

"Did you never think of becoming a forester yourself?" asked Nora, wishing to turn his thoughts from his jealous grievances, for such she knew them to be.

"I had not health or strength for it," he answered; "but even had it been otherwise, my whole thoughts were bent on being a painter. As soon as I was free from the day-school, I began to carry my father's paints; when I left off attending the Sunday-school, I learned his trade, thinking, in my ignorance, that it was a good foundation for my future career; and I ended by going to Munich, with ideas so contracted, that I supposed technical skill all that was necessary to make me a celebrated artist!"

"A very natural mistake on your part," observed

Nora, "when one takes into consideration the trade you had learned from your father."

"Perhaps so; but coming into a knowledge of one's ignorance is not agreeable, Mademoiselle. It seemed as if the more I learned the less I knew."

"That is the case with most people," said Nora, "and is by no means confined to artists and their studies."

"I got into despair at last," continued Florian; "tried portrait-painting, but soon discovered that the photographers were competitors with whom only first-rate artists could contend; so, when my father died, I returned home and established myself as his successor. My mother and Genoveva were made happy, they say, but I'm sure I don't know why, for I give them both a great deal of trouble, and am often ungrateful for their attentions. Vevey especially has had a hard life lately; but my mother is kind to her, and in return she has patience with me."

Nora, who had long been standing beside the half-open door, now took leave. He accompanied her down the stairs, promising, as he opened the door of the shop, to let her know when he had completed the renovation of the altar for St. Hubert's.

Great was Nora's surprise to find her cousin John in eager discussion with Madame Cramer, about the purchase of some very coarse, dark-green cloth, to make what he called a "rain mantle." "A famous thing," as he immediately explained to her, "worn by all the men employed in felling wood on the mountains." To judge by the pattern, it was a very formless garment, with merely an opening in the centre for the head; nevertheless, some seams it must have had, for it was to be sent to the

tailor, and the measure of John's shoulders was carefully taken by Madame Cramer.

"I thought you had all sorts of waterproof jackets and caps?" observed Nora.

"Well, so I have, but I prefer being dressed like other people. There is no use in making oneself remarkable, you know; and I may be in places where being known by my coat might prove troublesome."

"Am I to understand, Jack," said Nora, "that you have found some one to go out deer-stalking with you?"

"Deer-stalking or chamois-hunting, as the case may be," he answered, seating himself on the counter, and, in the full security of not being understood by any one but his cousin, continuing, "I have been thinking, Nora, that I must begin to limit my confessions to you; and, indeed, for your own sake, you had better ask me no questions in future about where I am going, or what I intend to do. You see, dear girl, if you know too much, you may in the end be obliged to bear witness against me, and you wouldn't like to do that, I am sure!"

"I thought," said Nora, reproachfully, "I thought you would have waited a week or ten days longer, until Mr. Torp had left the village."

"He has no intention of leaving," said John. "I heard him say that the scarcity of game enhanced its value; and that he believed an Englishman liked wandering through a picturesque country just as well as a German, though he might talk less about it. He seems to enjoy himself here, this Mr. Torp, and likes wearing his tweed jacket and wide-awake — and hunting, and fishing, and playing skittles, and pretending not to see us, and all the rest of it; and I tell you, Nora, he

has no more idea of leaving the village than we have. The forester's son is going out to-morrow to look after some chamois that were seen above the Wild Alp; and the day after, Torp and Waldemar are to hunt there. Now they all know I wish to join them, but not one can invite me, because that fellow Torp won't allow them!"

"You have not yet tried Captain Falkner."

"Yes I have," answered John. "He is evidently flirting with Georgy, so I asked him yesterday, point-blank, to let me shoot on his ground — and what do you think he said? His father had given up hunting; he himself was only occasionally at home on leave of absence, and that they had now let their chase to the forester: he had only reserved a right for himself, and was obliged to purchase his own game when his mother wished for it! I saw he was sorry he could not oblige me — more, of course, on Georgy's account than mine; and he even proposed speaking to the forester; but as I did not choose him to know that, at Torp's instigation, I had already been refused in that quarter, I requested him to say nothing about the matter, for that I could amuse myself walking about on the mountains, and making excursions into Tyrol."

"I wish you would, for the present, be satisfied with doing so," said Nora, earnestly.

"I am much more likely to have a shot at the chamois, near the Wild Alp, before any of them," cried John, exultingly.

"Then I may not hope that you will go with me to our landlord's alp to-morrow?"

John shook his head, and turning to Madame Cramer, requested, in broken but very intelligible German, that

his woodman's mantle might be made in the course of the next few hours, as he should probably want it that very evening.

Nora left the shop with him, and walked towards the inn without asking another question, or attempting remonstrances that she knew would be useless.

CHAPTER II.

Treats of Marriage and other Matters.

NORA found her uncle and Georgina still sitting at the breakfast-table, and was at first somewhat provoked at the little inclination shown to join her alp party. Now, though she did not, perhaps, very particularly desire their company, the appearance of separating herself so completely from them as of late, was not quite in accordance with her ideas of propriety, so she combated with some pertinacity all Georgina's objections.

"Change of weather to be expected!" she repeated; "not in the least probable for some days. The wind blows out of the mountains in the morning, and into them during the day, in the most satisfactory manner."

"But I have heard," said Georgina, "that the alps about here lie very high, and the excursions to them are, in consequence, exceedingly fatiguing."

"We are not going to a high alp; the cattle have already left most of them. The one I mean is quite easy of ascent."

"I dare say, however," rejoined Georgina, "that there are places without a path, and rocks to be scrambled over, and springs and rivulets in all directions, to wet one's feet."

Nora could not deny the probability of such im-

pediments being in the way, but suggested that strong boots would make the path of little importance, especially after a continuance of fine weather, such as they had lately had.

"They say," persisted Georgina, "that one generally arrives at such places ravenously hungry; and there is nothing to eat but dreadfully greasy messes, such as the peasants here delight in — and they might disagree with papa, you know!"

"I shall take care that no such messes be set before him," said Nora, good-humouredly.

"I'm afraid of nothing but the too warm weather," observed Mr. Nixon.

"And I," said Georgina, "am much more afraid of — of —"

"Of what?"

"Of the dirt and smoke," she replied, with a slight grimace.

"But we are not going to sleep there, and I am quite sure that where I propose going every thing will be perfectly clean."

"John has had experience, Nora, and he assures me —"

"Most probably," said Nora, interrupting her, "John did not want to have you with him. He does not wish for my company either, but found other means to prevent me from joining him."

"That may be the case," rejoined Georgina, thoughtfully, "for when I first came here I really intended to make some excursions; but he told me at once that they were not the sort of thing I should like and that a — in short, my feet were better fitted for parquet floors than mountain paths."

"I think," said Mr. Nixon, with a sly smile and a wink to Nora, "I think that was said by the captain at St. Benedict's, as we were getting out of the boat, Georgy."

"Well, perhaps it was," she answered, her colour a good deal deeper than usual; "he, too, rather dissuaded me from undertaking any expeditions of the kind, and he has a sister —"

"Who," said Nora, "has most probably been on every mountain in the neighbourhood."

"Yes, but made herself quite ill last year by attempting to follow a Countess Schaumberg from Vienna, who, he tells me, can use a rifle and hunt as well as the keenest sportsman, and from his account must be a specimen of a German masculine woman. In England, when we become manly, we turn completely to the stable, talk of horses and delight in slang; this countess does not ride, or even drive a pony carriage, but she has a choice collection of fire-arms, and takes her chasseur and dogs wherever she goes."

"When is she expected here?" asked Nora.

"In about a fortnight or three weeks. She comes here for the marriage of Captain Falkner's sister, who has long been engaged to Count Carl Benndorff of Herrenburg Achenanger Drachenthal."

"How well you pronounce these hard words," said Nora, laughing; "one would think you had been taking lessons in German."

"Well, so she has," said her father with a significant grimace, "she is reading a book of poetry with the captain, and seems to get on famously; but she can't understand other people's German, or talk a word to the little boy who catches minnows for me when I want bait."

never
"Perhaps," said Nora demurely, "my proposed alp party might have interfered with the German lessons?"

"Not far wrong, Nora," cried Mr. Nixon, with a loud laugh. "Come, Georgy, tell the truth and shame the devil. If Nora had said the day *after* to-morrow you would have made less difficulties — a certain person will be out hunting then, you know."

Georgina's colour again deepened as she said that she had not thought of Captain Falkner when objecting to the alp party.

"Well," said Mr. Nixon, nudging Nora as she sat beside him, "well, *I'm* not ashamed to say that if you will put off your excursion until the day after to-morrow we shall be happy to join you, eh Georgy? To-morrow, you see, the captain might expect us to — no matter what — we couldn't disappoint him, you know — on no account — he might be unhappy or offended, for the captain is very fond of us, he is! and I, for my part, shouldn't mind confessing to you, if Georgy was out of the way, that I'm uncommon taken with him. He doesn't sit at my end of the boat, and has lately begun to ride on the bench, almost, indeed, turning his back to me; but it's all for the purpose of teaching Georgy German — she has told me so a hundred times, and I must believe her — he has not a thought beyond that book of songs —"

"Sonnets," said Georgina, joining half unwittingly in Nora's merry laugh.

When Mr. Nixon left them together a short time afterwards, some minutes elapsed before either of them spoke a word. At length Georgina, while playing diligently with her lace-sleeves and bracelets observed, "M.

Waldemar improves on acquaintance, Nora; we begin to think him very gentlemanlike."

"I never thought him otherwise," said Nora; "he is very unaffected, agreeable, and gay, and forms a most pleasing contrast to our cold proud countryman, Mr. Torp."

"Who certainly does give himself wonderful airs for a Mr. Torp!" said Georgina, scornfully. "I am rather glad he avoids our acquaintance, though I am inclined to think he is not quite so insignificant a person as I at first supposed; he is not vulgar or pompous, and his insufferable arrogance I now begin to think may proceed from his having a large fortune, and considering himself an object of speculation to designing young ladies. Nesbitt tells me he has a servant who dresses as well or rather better than his master, and walks about all day amusing himself; it seems, too, he imitates Mr. Torp in manners as well as dress, declines all the civil advances of Monsieur Adam and Mrs. Nesbitt, and was so seldom heard to speak that for a long time people could not find out whether he were German, English, or French!"

"I suppose, however," said Nora, "the interesting discovery has been made at last?"

"Nesbitt says that Adam's abuse of a Russian family with whom he had travelled last year, roused him in so unusual a manner that little doubt now remains of his being a Russian."

"Did you really feel any curiosity on this subject, Georgina?" asked Nora, surprised.

"Only inasmuch as it proves that this Mr. Torp has probably travelled about a good deal."

"Oh, if you care to know," said Nora, "M. Waldemar

told me that his friend had been for the last ten years almost constantly on the continent."

"I should rather like to know something about him and his family," said Georgina.

"Why?" asked Nora.

"Because one naturally feels curious about a person with whom one has spent some weeks under the same roof in a small village like this. Captain Falkner has seen him very seldom, I believe, and calls him generally 'my friend's friend,' as if to prove that he knows nothing about him."

"I cannot say that I feel the slightest interest or curiosity concerning him," observed Nora, carelessly.

"Perhaps you will not say so when I tell you that M. Waldemar is not, as I supposed, an artist by profession: he is the eldest son of a Count Benndorff, a Tyrolean nobleman of very old family—." She paused, as if expecting some demonstration of surprise on the part of Nora.

"Well," said the latter, smiling, "do you not remember my telling you not to judge of people by their coats or shoes in the mountains here: I said it was even possible he might be a prince in disguise!"

"I do recollect your saying something to that purport," said Georgina; "and it is odd enough that he probably will be a prince in the course of time. Papa says these foreign titles are perfectly worthless, and Mrs. Savage Wayward told me, before I left England, that I should find princes, counts, and barons like mushrooms in Germany. They don't seem quite so plenty, after all, which is curious when one considers that all the children inherit the parental title."

"Captain Falkner's instructions," observed Nora,

"have apparently not been confined altogether to the song-book as my uncle calls it."

"No," answered Georgina, "he speaks good English and excellent French, so we have discussed a variety of subjects."

"Such as, for instance —" said Nora, and then she paused with a look of interrogation.

"Whether I could make up my mind to remain in Germany — 'for good,' as papa says when he means for ever."

"And do you feel disposed to resign the pomps and vanities of the London world, and retire to the cloisters of St. Benedict's?"

"Unfortunately that is only a happiness in perspective," answered Georgina, "for Captain Falkner cannot or will not give up his profession as long as there is what he calls a chance of war."

"And you like him well enough to follow his regiment, and submit to the discomforts of country quarters in Hungary, Transylvania, or elsewhere?"

"I requested twenty-four hours for consideration," replied Georgina, gravely. "After being so often and, as you know, so recently deceived in my expectations, I resolved to attach no importance to Captain Falkner's attentions, and was therefore completely taken by surprise yesterday evening. If you had not come here this morning I should have gone to you for advice, knowing no one more competent to give it."

"Had you so spoken ten years ago," said Nora, "I should have discussed this matter in a manner that would have convinced you I was worthy of the confidence placed in my wisdom; for my mother having herself made two love matches, and neither proving par-

ticularly happy, educated me in an almost overstrained rational manner, making me not at all disposed to fall in love myself, or fancy others in love with me. At the age of sixteen or seventeen I might have been reasoned or have reasoned myself into almost any proposed *mariage de convenance*, while now, strange to say, at six-and-twenty I feel myself growing seriously sentimental and romantic, and consider love the chief desideratum."

"I think I may take it for granted that Captain Falkner likes me," said Georgina, smiling, "and I like him, not perhaps quite as well as — one who never really cared for me. But I am tired of struggling in the world of fashion, and am no longer young, have no wish to end my life as the unmarried one of the family; and my chances are few at home, Nora, for the increase of the female population in England is monstrous they say. So all things considered —"

"All things considered," said Nora, laughing, "you have made up your mind to marry, and only ask advice in the hope of being confirmed in your resolution. Now I begin to think that I can scarcely venture to give an opinion on this occasion, having scarcely seen Captain Falkner half-a-dozen times. In fact, were he to burst upon my dazzled sight in the full glory of his Austrian uniform at this moment, I should positively not know him. Don't you think, instead of the grey jacket and straw hat, you could persuade him to dress himself in all his accoutrements for our gratification, when he comes this evening formally to demand your hand of my uncle? Dress *does* make such a difference, as Bob Acres says."

"Nora, you are laughing at me," cried Georgina, a good deal discomposed.

"I ought rather to envy you," replied Nora, seriously, "for you have evidently gained the affection of an honourable man, who, without knowing anything of your family or fortune, tells you he loves you, and asks you in marriage. I have never had the happiness of being loved in this manner, Georgina; but so highly have I learned to value a perfectly disinterested attachment, that I would willingly give all I possess to be able to inspire any one with such an affection for me. Of this, however, there is now no chance, so I must take the place you decline, and become the 'unmarried one' of our family."

"Then," said Georgina, smiling cheerfully, "then you do not think I am about to do a foolish thing, Nora?"

"Certainly not," answered Nora, moving towards the door, "that is, if you are quite sure that you love him."

On descending to the road before the inn, she perceived a number of children just released from school, dispersing homewards; the boys whooped, whistled, shoved and cuffed each other, playing at ball with their caps, hats, and books, as boys will do to the end of time most probably. A mad-cap girl occasionally attempted to join in the rough sport, but as often retreated, hurt or frightened, to more quiet companions. She was scarcely well received by the groups of little girls, who, with arms entwined, were confidentially whispering to each other their little secrets, or perhaps animadverting severely on her unruly conduct. Two very youthful maidens lingered among the feeding-troughs for horses, ranged along the wall of the inn, and Nora perceived at

once that they were imitating their mothers, and enjoying a little gossip.

"It was when I was going to school this very morning that I heard her," said one little chatter-box to the other; "'Adieu, Count Waldemar,' says she, 'and a pleasant journey home,' says she."

"Well, to be sure, the courage that she has!" interposed the other. "As mother says, the boldness of that girl is not to be believed."

"And," continued the first, "'A pleasant journey home,' says she, 'Count Waldemar,' and runs away, and he after her, and laughs and lifts her up ever so high and shakes her."

"I'm glad of it," said number two; "many a shake she gets from her mother, and well she deserves them."

"She didn't mind the shake a bit," said the first speaker, "for the count told the landlady to give her the biggest piece of cake in the house, and she came running after me with a lump of kugelhopf full of currants and covered with almonds, and she as proud as a peacock."

"Well," said number two, "I couldn't think where she got that cake: it was very good, and she gave me a piece of it, and Catty, and Lina, and —"

"She did not dare to offer me any," said the first speaker, with proud propriety. "I had seen her pertness, and taxed her with it. To speak to the count and he getting into the carriage, and the strange gentleman from England, and all the people of the inn, and the postilion from the town standing by!"

Here Nora, not altogether uninterested in their discourse, moved towards the speakers, but after a hurried frightened curtsy, they both scampered off, and she turned to the little romp, who, having been thrown down

in a concluding scuffle, was now rubbing the dust and gravel from her pink petticoat and black boddice, while a red-haired boy, riding on one of the feeding-troughs, alone remained to pity or enjoy her discomfiture. She looked up as Nora approached, and showed a pretty, round, sunburnt face that no doubt had attracted the artist eye of Count Waldemar, and made him acquainted with her. She was not at all shy, and laughed as Nora shook some gravel from her thick curly hair, and asked who had thrown her down.

"Red Hans," said the little girl, pointing to the grinning, freckled-faced boy, who was moving about on the trough in a reckless manner, making movements with his long, dangling, bare legs, as if spurring a horse.

"And who is Red Hans?"

"He belongs to the widow at Waltenburg."

"And you?"

"I'm the hammersmith's Nanerl. Come, Hans, let's go home to dinner."

The boy instantly descended from his imaginary horse and came towards her. "Nanerl won't tell," he said, glancing towards Nora. "She knows I'd get no dinner from the hammersmith if she made a complaint."

"Why don't you go home to dinner?" asked Nora.

"'Cause mother's so poor, and the hammersmith said I could have a bit with Nanerl every day."

"I'm afraid you're a very naughty boy," said Nora; "you ought to take care of her instead of throwing her down, as you did just now."

Hans looked embarrassed.

"He's a scamp," said the little girl, promptly. "Father says so, and mother too; but I like him, and we play at wildschütz together."

"And you are the sennerin on the alp, and take care of the cows?"

"No, I'm a wildschütz too," she answered. "Come along, Hans, I won't tell; come along."

Glad to escape, he seized her hand and pulled her after him as he rushed down the road into the midst of the village.

Nora looked after them and smiled.

"Now that girl is regularly 'doing the poor,'" muttered Torp to himself, as he peered from behind one of the old chestnut trees in the garden, beneath which he had breakfasted. "I suppose," he continued, in soliloquy, "she is waiting for Waldemar, expecting him to go to the ruins with her. '*Mees Nora*,' you may wait long; by this time I should think your adorer must be in Tyrol."

Had Waldemar been beside him, Torp would have turned away his head, to prove his total indifference to the presence of so insignificant a personage as a Miss Nora Nixon, whereas he now thought proper to indulge his curiosity without reserve, and for the first time took a long and steady stare at the unconscious Nora, as she stood on the road between the garden and the inn. Dressed, as usual, in a check black and grey silk, he thought her figure as graceful as any he had seen for a long time; and even beneath the hideous coarse straw hat the delicate little face appeared to such advantage that he magnanimously rejoiced in the absence of his friend, and applauded himself for his disinterested conduct.

Just as Nora was about to walk away, she perceived the forester's son, Franz, coming towards the village; he hastened his steps, and advanced so directly towards

her, that she first stopped, and then moved a few steps to meet him.

"Oh ho! what is the meaning of all this?" thought Torp, as the young man, raising his hat, exhibited a pale, agitated face, and began to speak with an eagerness and vehemence of action very different from his usual tranquil manner.

Nora's cheerful smile faded away, and a look of deep interest spread over her features as she listened, and began to walk slowly along the road with him.

"Madeleine said you were at the mill, Mademoiselle," observed Franz, "and that you can bear witness that she told black Sepp she did not care for him, and would not marry him."

"I remember hearing her say so," replied Nora.

"He reminded her," continued Franz, "of some promise that she had made years ago."

Nora nodded assent.

"But," he added, "that is of no importance, for she must have been then almost a child; and she confesses having made promises of the same kind to half-a-dozen others before she was sixteen."

Nora looked grave, but did not speak.

"She would have braved him if she had dared," he continued; "but her father, she says, has entered into solemn engagements with the Tyrolean, who contrived to make himself useful and necessary when the family were poor and in debt. It seems he not only served without receiving wages, but even assisted them in various ways, all, as it now appears, on condition that Madeleine was to be his wife."

"It is incomprehensible to me," observed Nora, "why

the miller permitted an engagement with you under such circumstances."

"I cannot say he was exactly willing," said Franz; "it was *my* father who urged it at Ammergau, on account of the fortune perhaps — and other friends helped, and laughed at the idea of the miller consulting his workman about the marriage of his daughter! I only thought of Madeleine's beauty, and the triumph of carrying her off from all the others, and so it was settled an hour after we came together."

"Has Madeleine broken off her engagement with you altogether?" asked Nora.

"She said she must, for that her father, at black Sepp's instigation, had withdrawn his consent, and until his death she would have no fortune; I have none either, and must wait long to become forstwart."

"You seemed just now," said Nora, after a pause, "to think I could be of use to you. I cannot, however, imagine in what way."

"Madeleine thought if you called on the priest, and got him to speak to her father and black Seppel, it might do good; they have both a great respect for his reverence."

"Could not her mother explain the state of the case better," suggested Nora.

"Madeleine tells me her mother takes part with the miller, and is now more disposed towards the Tyrolean than me."

"That is not improbable," said Nora, musingly, "and if you really think that my interference can be of use to you, I will go at once to the priest."

"Thank you, mademoiselle, you are very kind. His reverence is at home now, I am sure, and either in the

garden or looking after his bees. I should not have given you this trouble, if Madeleine had not expressly forbidden any interference on my part, which, she said, would do no good, and only serve to irritate her father. She hoped that you, who had been so kind to Rosel, would not refuse to help her, and it seems she was not mistaken."

"Will you wait here to be made acquainted with the result of the conference?" asked Nora.

"I cannot," he answered, "for Count Waldemar sent express for me this morning, to tell me that he was going home, and must trust altogether to me to find sport for his friend from England, as the captain at St. Benedict's had said he had no time at present to call on the gentleman, or go out hunting with him; so I must now look after some chamois, said to be in the neighbourhood of the Wild Alp, and I'm glad of the walk, or anything that takes me from the village just now."

He opened the wicket of the priest's garden, bowed low as she passed him, and stood looking after her; when she entered the open door of the house, and commenced a conversation with the old housekeeper, who had advanced to meet her.

Unperceived by both, Torp sauntered along the road, his hands thrust into the pockets of his shooting jacket, his eyes fixed on the sunny summit of the mountain that rose high above the shingled roof of the parsonage.

Light, and airy, and clean, like all the priests' houses Nora had ever seen in Germany, was this one also. It seemed as if everything had been just freshly scoured; and when the door of the reception room was opened, she found herself in precisely the sort of apart-

ment she had expected. Two side, and three front windows were furnished with very white thin muslin curtains carefully draped aside; there were six chairs, a round table, a sofa, and two chests of drawers in the room; on one of the latter, a well carved crucifix, on the other a pair of silver candlesticks. She had scarcely time to look round her, when the door of an adjoining room was opened, and a middle-aged, intelligent, and rather solemn-looking man advanced towards her; his coat was very long, his cravat very stiff, his high forehead rendered higher by incipient baldness, and his carefully-shaved cheeks and chin remarkably blue coloured. He approached Nora with a succession of slight, shy bows; and as he stopped before her, and placed his right hand slowly in the bosom of his coat, the peculiar priestly movement betrayed to her at once *his* embarrassment, and removed hers.

Accepting the offered chair, she informed him of as much of the miller's story as she felt herself at liberty to relate, and he listened to her throughout with the most undeviating attention, observing, when she paused for an answer, that "He was not surprised, but sorry for what had occurred, on account of the forester's family; he should scarcely feel justified in speaking to the miller in the manner she desired; and had little hope of influencing the Tyrolean, who was in the habit of avoiding the church in Almenau, by crossing the mountains to visit his family, almost every Sunday and holy day; the man was violent and resolute, and not likely to listen to expostulations from any one."

"I regret to hear this," said Nora, "for he seems to have the miller completely in his power."

A momentary flash of intelligence gleamed in the

priest's eyes, but passed as quickly as lightning; and it was with his eyes fixed on the ground that he observed, "The miller is a weak — a very weak — man, mademoiselle, and has unfortunately left his affairs completely to the superintendence of his chief workman during the last six years, and has become dependent on him: he was very poor when I came to reside here, but has since inherited a good deal of money from a brother, and his daughter as village heiress has been latterly the prize for which all the neighbouring peasants have been contending. She has been the subject of more quarrels, and the cause of more brawls than she is worth; and knowing her to be an idle, pleasure-loving girl, you must excuse my saying that a separation from her would be the greatest piece of good fortune that could happen to the young assistant forester."

"Unfortunately he does not think so," said Nora, "and he and Madeleine now place their whole reliance on you."

"I shall speak to *him* this evening, and I hope to some purpose," he answered dryly.

"You will not find him at home, as he is going to the Wild Alp," rejoined Nora; "and if what I have said has led you to form the design of dissuading him from a renewal of his engagement, I have indeed proved but a sorry advocate, and had better cease to plead."

"Mademoiselle," said the priest, politely, "no better advocate could have been chosen on this occasion; I have heard of your generosity to Rosel, and can assure you it is not misplaced; she is, and always has been a good girl; her brother also is worthy of regard, and you cannot be more interested in his welfare than I am. I have hitherto avoided all interference in the marriages

of my parishioners: they are generally rational contracts made by the parents, in which the parties most concerned are so little consulted, that the refusal to bestow a cow or calf has not unfrequently broken off a match in every respect desirable. Now I have little doubt that interested motives induced the forester to propose his son to the miller for his daughter."

"I understood," said Nora, "that Franz and Madeleine had long been attached to each other."

"Madeleine's attachments," said the priest, with a contemptuous smile, "have been very numerous. Franz has not lived at home for many years; and though I think it more than probable that he admires Madeleine, who is considered very handsome, I suspect she accepted him for the purpose of becoming, in the course of time, a forester's or perhaps even a forstmeister's wife, and being able to wear a bonnet."

"Wear a bonnet!" repeated Nora, "could she not wear one now if she pleased?"

"No, mademoiselle, a peasant's daughter does not wear a bonnet in this country; but what I meant to express was, that Madeleine's ambition was to become a lady."

"Oh," said Nora, "I understand you now."

"Yet I was not speaking in the least metaphorically," continued the priest; "Franz has been to the forester academy, will receive a place under government, and, as his wife, there is nothing to prevent Madeleine from substituting a bonnet for the peasant hat, or still simpler black kerchief so universally worn here. The silver-laced boddice, short skirt, and apron will be thrown aside, and replaced by a modish gown, and the ignorant, vain girl will fancy the metamorphosis complete."

"She will look uncommonly pretty in any dress," said Nora. "I have seldom seen more perfect features."

"Mademoiselle," said the priest, almost reproachfully, "you attach too much importance to beauty. I could prove to you that the plainest girl in this village is by many degrees the cleverest and most amiable!"

"Oh pray tell me all about her," cried Nora, eagerly, "you can in no way oblige me more than by giving me information concerning the people here."

"If that be the case," said the priest, "perhaps you will go to the school-house with me, and look over the judgment books."

The school-house was not far distant. An unpretending building, in no way differing from the others in the village, excepting that the whole of the ground floor was required for the large school-room, which was amply lighted by side and front windows, and furnished with long rows of benches and desks, suited to the different ages of the pupils, and increasing progressively in height as they receded towards the door. A broad space in the middle of the room served to separate the boys from the girls, and afforded the school-master a place, which he constantly perambulated, to the no small terror of idle or mischievous children.

As Nora and the priest advanced into the school-room, Torp's head might have been seen at one of the open windows thrust through the clustering leaves of a vine trained against the wall of the house. There was a mixture of curiosity and irony in the expression of his face as he listened to Nora's questions, and saw her poring over the large blue books so willingly presented

to her for inspection by the schoolmaster. It is probable she asked questions he had no objection to hear answered, as he remained at the window, and even stretched forward once or twice as if he also wished to see the contents of the judgment books.

When Nora took leave, followed to the door by both her companions, she found Rosel waiting for her near the church, and they soon after entered the footpath in the wood that led to the ruins of Waltenburg.

At some distance before her Nora soon perceived Torp. Why he just then chose to go where, from her conversation with Waldemar the previous evening, he knew he was likely to meet her, she could not well imagine. It never occurred to her, that, unconscious of the information she had obtained of Waldemar's departure, both from the schoolchildren and Franz, he felt a mischievous pleasure in the expectation of seeing her sitting on some fragment of the ruin confidently expecting the arrival of his friend! Yet it must be confessed that this idea had for some minutes served to amuse Torp, when he first turned into the wood, and seemed to recur, when, having scrambled to a prominent place on a weather-beaten wall, he looked down with laughing eyes, and watched her progress over the few mouldering planks that supplied the place of the drawbridge.

Scarcely, however, had she and Rosel entered the precincts of the ruin, and looked over the wall that commanded a view of the high road, than they heard a loud and joyous jodel, and saw soon afterwards a young man springing up the hill, flourishing his hat in the air, and followed more leisurely by an old peasant, whose long-tailed, short-waisted, grass-green coat made

Nora instantly recognise the man now well known to her by the name of "Craggs."

Nora's inclination to build castles in the air on the ruins of Waltenburg instantly vanished, and she turned back to meet the old man and his son, who were evidently bearers of good news. With much pleasure she heard that the judge had appointed the following Thursday for the signing of the contract of resignation, and that he would that very afternoon come to Almenau to speak to her.

"About the thousand florins, you know, miss," said the old man; "for I told him I was sure you were ready to deposit the money in his hands on Thursday, or even sooner, if it were necessary."

"Quite right," said Nora, smiling at the peasant's cunning way of informing her that she would be required to keep her promise sooner perhaps than she had expected.

"When I have once made up my mind to do a thing," he continued, with much self-complaisance, "I do it. And that's why I did not wait till next week to go into our town, but says to Seppel this morning says I — If the young lady is willing to make that agreement respecting the churchyard, says I, let's take her at her word, says I, and strike while the iron is hot."

Again Nora smiled, and he continued: "If it's agreeable to you, miss, the betrothal can take place at the forester's on Thursday evening, and before you leave the village I'll move with my old woman into the off house, and let Seppel bring home Rosel."

"You could not do anything that would give me more pleasure," said Nora.

She had scarcely ceased speaking when, more to

her amusement than surprise, Seppel waved his hat in the air, and at the same time raising his right leg, he gave vent to his feelings of exultation in a shout that caused Torp to look in some astonishment at the pantomime being performed on the green hill beneath him.

"This very day," said Seppel, "I'll go to the Kerbstein lake, and invite my mother's brother to come to us on Thursday next."

"The fisherman there is your uncle," observed Nora.

"And — my godfather, too, miss, and has done his duty by me handsome from beginning to end. I would not miss being the first to tell him of my betrothal for any consideration, so I'll just run on, and take leave of my mother, and perhaps I may get to the lake before nightfall, if not, I can turn into one of the huts on the Wild Alp."

"The cattle have been driven down from want of pasture," shouted his father after him, as he bounded down before them. "You will not find a cow or sennarin on the whole mountain now!"

"No matter," he answered, laughing, "the keys of the huts are to be found under the benches before the door, and I can have my choice of the lofts, and the hay in all of them!"

"A spirited and a handsome fellow he is, there is no doubt of that," murmured old Craggs, as he plodded on beside Nora and her perfectly happy companion. "I sometimes think a little of his life and energy would do Anderl no harm, but one can't have everything one wishes, and in respect of steadiness there's no comparison!"

CHAPTER IV.

Jack's First Exploit.

THE next day was partly spent by Nora in becoming better acquainted with Captain Falkner. She perceived that he knew more of Torp than he was at liberty to divulge even to Georgina, and rejoiced that the incognito was to be continued for some time longer, as she had learned to distrust her uncle's professions of indifference to rank, and feared that Torp's haughty reception of his civilities might put her patience to a severe test.

She accompanied her uncle to the lake at St. Benedict's, interpreted for him when he chose to talk to the people about the place, joined Georgina in trying to persuade Captain Falkner to leave the army, and made plans for the future in which, as possessor of Waltenburg, she was to be their nearest neighbour. She would have spent a pleasant day in the society of companions so evidently happy, had not John's absence caused her much uneasiness. He had left them the day before after a hasty dinner, and laughing congratulations to his sister and Captain Falkner, and not having returned during the night she feared, and at last firmly believed, that he had gone, as he had said he would, to the Wild Alp. It was there, also, that Seppel had proposed to pass the night, and she knew not whether to suppose a planned meeting on both sides, or an unlucky chance that would inevitably lead to mutual temptation. She remembered, too, with increasing anxiety, that Franz had returned home for Torp during the previous evening, and that Rosel had mentioned having seen them pass the forest-house together just before she went to

bed. Their destination was also the Wild Alp, and she dreaded to think what might occur there should a meeting take place.

Long, therefore, appeared the day, still longer the evening, but at last, leaving her uncle, Georgina, and Captain Falkner under one of the trees near the inn, she sauntered through the village, preoccupied and dejected, responding more laconically than was her wont to the "God evenings" wished her by the peasants who sat or stood before their doors. Scarcely, however, was she beyond the village, and within sight of the forest-house, when she heard her name pronounced in a low, cautious manner, and on looking towards the place whence the voice came she saw her cousin John, standing far above her in the deep shade of an old beech-tree. He seemed to have just descended from the summit of the mountain, along the steep side of which the road had been made; but instead of joining her, as she expected, he beckoned impatiently, and then receded still further into the wood, as if unwilling to be seen.

A good deal alarmed at his manner, Nora sprang up the bank, and when beside him looked anxiously into his face. It was still light enough for her to see him distinctly, and, under any other circumstances, she would have indulged in a hearty laugh, so oddly did his disordered hair and smutted face contrast with his smart English walking-dress: but the streaks of soot about the roots of his hair, and the comical prolongation of his eyebrows, produced hardly the shadow of a smile on her countenance, as, reassured of his personal safety by his presence, she said, gravely, "I see, Jack, you have had your face blackened, and been out poaching."

"Call it wild hunting, if you please," he cried, embracing her somewhat turbulently, "and let me tell you, Nora, that I have no wish to be anything but a hunter of this sort, as long as I may chance to remain in this jolly country, for more exciting sport it is impossible to imagine; I would not have missed last night's hunt, or this morning's fun, for anything that could be offered me. But I have got into a little dilemma, Nora, out of which you must help me, and keep my secret into the bargain."

"A dilemma," she repeated; "oh, Jack, I hope it does not concern Seppel in any way! You do not know what unhappiness it will cause, if he should be detected, or even suspected just now. I say nothing of the consequences to yourself, but for a mere frolic to destroy irretrievably the prospects of a young man whose father has so lately consented to resign his property to him, that he may be able to marry the person to whom he has been so long —"

"Oh, I know all that!" he cried, interrupting her, "I've promised to dance at his wedding, if he has not to wait another half-dozen years before he celebrates is."

"Should he be brought before the judge as a wildschütz," said Nora, "there is an end to all his hopes, for his father will undoubtedly disinherit him!"

"There is much more danger of his being shot by your friend the forester, than brought before the judge," said Jack. "I never saw such a dare-devil of a fellow in my life, to say nothing of his having friends and accomplices at both sides of the mountains."

"And you have induced him to re-commence these dangerous and unlawfully practices," observed Nora,

reproachfully, "after his having refrained from them for upwards of six years!"

"Bosh!" cried Jack. "The people about here may believe that, and think he never touches a rifle now; but he told me, — no matter what — a different story, at all events, and I must believe him, for he had his clothes in one house and his gun in another, and knew perfectly well where to find the key to the uninhabited chalet in which we blackened our faces."

"On the Wild Alp, most probably," said Nora, sorrowfully.

"The very place," exclaimed Jack; "but we did not remain long there, for directly after sunset we began our hunt, and were joined by three fellows from Tyrol, who had seen no trace of chamois, though they had been out all the previous night. They proposed, however, giving me a 'stand,' as they called it, near a spot of ground that has been much frequented lately by deer; and, as we had famous moonlight, I had only to keep to leeward of the direction in which they were likely to come. But to get to this place, Nora, Seppel and I had to creep through narrow defiles and over rocks, to clamber up-hill on loose sand, through bushes and brambles, and, at last, actually to crawl like worms over stones and trunks of trees, cast about in all directions by one of those mountain-torrents now without a drop of water, though sometimes quite a broad, deep stream."

"I can easily imagine such a place," said Nora; "and, though I do not exactly understand why you crawled over the stones —"

"To prevent them from rolling, and either alarming the deer or attracting the attention of those foresters, who are perpetually on the look-out."

"Well," said Nora, "go on. You shot something, I suppose, or you would not have got into a dilemma? Tell me what happened."

"Oh, that was long after; and I rather expect you will enjoy, or at all events excuse, the scrape I have got into this time, as there is no harm done, and you can easily prevent any unpleasant consequences."

"Tell me how, and let me do it then," said Nora, impatiently.

"I thought you would like to have a full and true account of all that occurred; besides, you cannot be of any use until to-morrow morning."

"In that case," said Nora, "you may be as circumstantial as you please; and while you relate, we can walk towards the inn together."

"By no means," cried Jack, catching her arm to detain her. "I do not wish to enter the village until it is dark, or the inn, until I can get to my own room, and wash my face without being observed: besides, for reasons which you will afterwards understand, I don't choose any one to know that I have seen or spoken to you."

"This sounds very mysterious, Jack; I wish you would be more explicit."

"Well, don't interrupt me so often," he rejoined; and then, having seated himself deliberately on a huge stone, he looked up with an air of extreme satisfaction, and an odd twinkle in his eyes, and asked abruptly; "Do you know what a *schmarn* is, Nora?"

"A sort of omelette, cut up into little pieces," she answered.

"And a woodman's *schmarn*?" he asked.

"Something similar, I believe, excepting that it is made with water instead of milk."

"Right: they call it *holz-muss*; and a better thing for keeping off^r hunger was never invented. That's what they gave me for supper yesterday evening."

"Where?" asked Nora.

"At one of the houses — I don't know whether it was in Tyrol or Bavaria; very civil people they were — wanted to return me the greater part of the money I gave them."

"Then you were probably in Bavaria," observed Nora; "but go on."

"It was fortunate I had had so substantial a supper, and carried off a piece of rye-bread in my pocket, for, after we came to the 'stand' they had talked so much about, the three Tyroleans left us, and we had to lie ensconced behind some rocks for hours and hours, listening to every sound, distant and near, with fatiguing attention, and peering out continually, to see if we could distinguish anything approaching the green spot at the other side of the nearly dried up rivulet that ran between the mountains. I think it must have been a couple of hours past midnight, when we heard the sound of rolling stones and gravel, and soon after perceived a stray roebuck descending from the more barren heights to the grass plot nearly opposite us. I could see every movement; and at one time, as he raised his head, and came forward to the very edge of the grazing-place, he was not thirty yards from the muzzle of my rifle! I raised it — my hand was on the trigger — when, — can you believe it, Nora? — I got into such a state of agitation, that I could not attempt to take aim. I don't think I ever in

my life had such a palpitation — such a fit of trembling —”

“And this is what you call sport!” said Nora.

“Pshaw!” he cried; starting up impatiently; “there’s no use in telling a woman anything of this kind, she can’t understand one! In short, he moved about unconscious of his danger; gave me ample time to recover my self-possession; and — I shot him. The row caused by the report of my rifle is not to be described! Why just on that spot there should be such an infernal echo, I cannot tell. It may have sounded louder from the long silence that had preceded it — perhaps, also, my wish to do the thing quietly made me more observant of the noise — but it seemed as if a regular discharge of musketry had taken place, followed by a rolling, like thunder, along the mountain-side, apparently endless; for, even as it gradually died away, a fresh report in the distance seemed to rouse the echo afresh, until I was perfectly aghast at the commotion I had caused.”

“I suspect,” observed Nora, “you are not the first wildschütz who would have liked to silence the echoes about him: but stay!” she added, hastily; “you say this happened about two o’clock in the morning? — now, Mr. Torp and Franz left Almenau at midnight, and must have been in the direction, and near enough to have heard your shot.”

“To be sure they heard it,” answered Jack, laughing; “and I dare say did their best to get at us: but, in order to prevent an unnecessary encounter, while I was listening to the echo, Seppel had scrambled across the stream, to where the roebuck was lying, nearly motionless, only giving evidence of life by deep breathings and

an occasional shiver, while enormous quantities of blood flowed from a wound in his side."

"Poor thing!" said Nora, compassionately; "I hope he did not suffer long."

"Oh, no," said Jack; "his struggles were soon over; for Seppel plunged his hanger into the nape of his neck in a most scientific manner, and he never moved afterwards."

"Well — well — and then?" said Nora.

"And then," continued Jack, "he butchered away for some time in a manner that I need not describe to you, and ended by placing the roebuck partly in his green linen bag, and slinging it, with my assistance, on his back. He afterwards put his fingers between his teeth, and produced a succession of piercing whistling sounds."

"What for?" asked Nora.

"A signal to the other fellows to join us: they had been searching about the rocks above us, as I had promised them something if I got a shot. Seppel said it was better to be satisfied with the roebuck for this time, and proposed going on to the alp, as he believed the forester was out on the mountain, and he was the last person he wished to meet just then."

"What a passion this hunting must be," soliloquised Nora; "not to be able to resist the temptation even now, when so much is at stake!"

"You may well say that," observed John; "for if the old man had seen us, we should have had bullets 'whistling as they went for want of thought.' They tell me he fires in a very unceremonious manner at every wildschütz he meets, ever since his eldest son was shot by one somewhere about here."

"The forester was, fortunately, at home last night," began Nora; "but his son and Mr. Torp —"

"I know, I know," cried John, interrupting her; "they came upon us at the Wild Alp, just as we had made a fire, and were going to cook our breakfast. One of our Tyroleans was on the watch; and, as we were five to two, we let them come on, and prepared for battle."

Nora looked alarmed, but John's laugh reassured her, and she let him continue without interruption.

"Our sentinel gave the alarm; we seized our rifles, and looked through the window, just in time to see the enemy advancing up the hill, and over the ground tramped into holes by the cattle in wet weather. Torp and his companion sprang behind some rocks, raised their rifles, and shouted to the Tyroleans, who appeared at the door, to deliver up their arms. They were answered by an order to sheer off, if they thought their lives worth preserving. Seppel, in the meantime, kept in the back-ground with me; and I am much mistaken if Torp, supposing us to be but three, did not consider himself, with the assistant forester, more than a match for us! At all events he showed more courage than prudence, for no sooner had the Tyroleans retreated into the hut, than he left his place of safety, and rushed after them, notwithstanding the loud remonstrances of his companion, who, nevertheless, seemed to think himself obliged to follow him. You should have seen how Seppel pounced upon the young forester —"

"What!" exclaimed Nora; "surely you must be mistaken!"

"Not a bit," cried Jack: "he knocked his rifle out of his hand, and then they wrestled desperately for a few seconds; but, with the assistance of one of the Tyroleans, he managed to get him down on the ground, and then

tied his hands behind his back, and afterwards his feet together."

"And Mr. Torp?" asked Nora.

"Torp floored the two fellows who attacked him without any difficulty, and was evidently making for the door, with his eye on his rifle, until I rushed to the rescue; and though I determined not to betray myself by speaking, and didn't say, 'Come on,' I'm afraid I looked it, for he turned to me at once, and we had a regular set-to, pitching into each other like —"

"Jack, Jack," cried Nora quickly, "you have betrayed yourself to Mr. Torp, and will be completely in his power."

"You could not expect me to wait until he knocked me down, too!" cried Jack; "I gave him fair play afterwards, at all events, for as soon as the others attacked him again, I drew off. I tell you, Nora, you would have died of laughing had you seen him, as I did, struggling on the floor, and giving them all employment before he was pinioned. He's an uncommonly powerful fellow, that Torp!"

"Perhaps," said Nora, "he did not observe any difference in your mode of attack from that of the others, for, after all, his surprise and the confusion must have been too great for him to make nice observations."

"I don't know," replied Jack, carelessly, "I kept out of his way as much as I could from the time he was overpowered by numbers. The young forester kicked, and writhed, and raged, vowing vengeance on us all: Torp never moved from the time that resistance was useless, and actually contrived to look dignified when lying helpless on the ground, fixing his great grey eyes upon us one after another with such scrutinizing glances

that we thought it expedient to get him out of the way, and had him carried into the little inner room and laid on the boards that had served as bedstead to the shepherdess — I mean dairy-maid, that is what they call *sennerin*."

"And did he not speak a word then?" asked Nora.

"He said that he hoped we would send some one up to release them before they were starved to death; but Seppel answered that he was not such a fool as to run the risk of having his messenger brought before the judge of the district to betray us. Torp then proposed terms, said that he would take no steps to discover us, and if we would release him at once he would even promise to remain three or four hours in the hut in order to give us time to get into Tyrol; but Seppel did not understand such chivalry, laughed in his face, and locked the door of the room."

"Good heavens, what a dreadful situation!" cried Nora; "surely, Jack, you interfered at last?"

"Not I," he said, with a laugh; "they would not hear of the young forester's being set at liberty, and I could not help enjoying Torp's discomfiture, after all his incivility to me. Of course I thought all the while of telling you, and proposing your making an excursion to the alp to-morrow, with one of your numerous peasant friends. You know you can be quite astonished at finding them prisoners, and all that sort of thing. Take plenty of *prog* with you, for they'll be deucedly hungry, I suspect, by the time you reach them."

"I wish I could go this moment," said Nora, uneasily, "it is horrible to think of their passing the night in such a way!"

"Why didn't Torp let me have my sport by fair

means?" said John; "if I can only have it by stealth he shall not interfere with me. You know you have often said he was a selfish, disagreeable man, Nora, and a little punishment of this kind may bring down his pride perhaps. At all events such things are not uncommon hereabouts, and as to their being starved, or anything of that kind, there is no danger whatever, for if the old forester did not go to look for them he could be sent an anonymous letter you know. The simplest of all plans, however, will be for you to go to the alp; Torp knows that you are continually making excursions of the kind, and —"

"And," interposed Nora, "and fortunately he has heard me say that I intended to go to this very place."

"Then go," cried John eagerly, "go, and get up a loud scream when you see him — afterwards you can laugh and question him as much as you like."

"I have only to leave Rosel in ignorance of all that has occurred," said Nora, "and she will be astonished and shocked enough for us both. And now, Jack, I must leave you to make arrangements with her, and put off my uncle and Georgina, who had at last consented to go to one of the lower alps near the village. The man who was to have been our guide must be told to call for me at three o'clock in the morning instead of eight, and I shall take all the provisions provided for my uncle to your prisoners."

"I say, Nora," cried John, calling after her as she descended to the road, "don't betray me by looking conscious when you see Torp, and avoid answering any questions he may ask you."

Rosel was not much surprised at Nora's change of plan: the excuse was so plausible, that she must take

advantage of the fine weather to go to the Wild Alp, as every one said that the path after rain would be impracticable for her, and a continuance of the present warm weather was not to be expected.

And Rosel explained this at some length, not only at the inn, but also when she went afterwards with a pair of Nora's boots to the shoemaker and requested him, late as it was, to put large nails in the soles, as otherwise her young lady would find it hard to get over the rocks and loose stones on the way down the mountain from the Wild Alp.

CHAPTER V.

The Wild Alp.

DAY had not dawned, but the moon, though completely screened by the mountains, still afforded a pale grey sort of light as Nora, accompanied by Rosel and an athletic young woodcleaver named Michael, left the forester's house. Their way was at first through meadows and gently sloping hills, and woods of beech and maple, past isolated peasants' houses where, early as it was, the thrashing-flail was already being swung by busy hands. Many were the morning greetings that Nora and her companions received as they passed the open barn doors, and great the surprise expressed when it was known that they were on their way to the Wild Alp, where the huts were uninhabited and the cattle driven home for the winter! Higher up Nora observed fields of corn and wheat scarcely ready for the sickle, and oats still green as grass. By degrees the beech, birch, and maple trees became rarer, and they entered a forest of pine and fir that Nora thought endless, and, in fact, it

covered a not inconsiderable mountain, over which they had to pass before they reached the one on which the Wild Alp was situated.

The mountains around Almenau joined those of Tyrol, and not unfrequently the line of boundary between Bavaria and Austria was made evident by a clearance of wood about the width of a road, which might be distinguished for miles through the forest district, seemingly made with as little regard to hill or dale as a line drawn on a map. Nora had been out some hours, and the sun had risen before she arrived at those higher regions whence she could observe this and look down on the chains of wooded mountains beneath, with their intersecting valleys and winding rivers; then, too, she caught the first glimpse of the long row of glaciers that so deeply interest the Highland tourist, each step rendering visible a greater extent of eternal snow and ice. More and more rugged became her path, while rocks of the most grotesque form seemed to start from the ground in all directions, and as they wound round the mountain on a narrow shelf that had been blasted in the rocks for the convenience of charcoal-burners and cattle, Nora stopped for a few minutes to look down a deep dry water-course, and wonder at the havoc caused by a small waterfall that now, trickling scantily from the heights above, seemed in no way to render necessary the bridge of felled trees over which she stepped; but which in spring or after rain probably swelled to a raging cataract, as it had prostrated trees and carried away everything impeding its course down the mountain. Masses of loose stones, gravel, and sand, forced along by the torrent, had not remained in the bed excavated by the water, but spreading over a wide space of ground at each side, had

created a scene of devastation that widened as it proceeded until finally lost in the chaos of rocks that vainly opposed the progress of a river far below in the gorge between the mountains.

When Nora turned from this spot and began to pursue her path, she perceived Rosel far above her, kneeling beside a wooden cross that had been placed in a sheltered nook beneath a ledge of rock; the sun's first glowing rays fell on it and the bent figure, and as Nora approached she perceived a tablet containing a picture fastened to the cross, and knew that on the spot where it stood some one had died suddenly, by accident or otherwise. When Rosel stood up, Nora bent forward and saw a very rough representation of a man with a blackened face, intended to represent a wildschütz, but which might also have been the portrait of a fiend incarnate, as from an ambush he fired at a young man whose trim uniform showed him to be a hunter and wood-ranger by profession.

"Your eldest brother, I suppose?" said Nora.

"Yes. My father, who heard the report of the rifle at the alp, ran on here and found him shot through the heart."

"And the wildschütz?" asked Nora.

"He escaped by sliding down the mountain on the sand, near the waterfall, at the place you were standing just now, and once in the forest below, there was no chance of finding him. My mother had this picture painted by Florian's father and put up here; but I sometimes think it would be better if she had been satisfied with the churchyard cross, for every time my father comes on this mountain, he vows fresh vengeance against every wildschütz he may hereafter meet. When

he is hunting or inspecting the woods about here, I can never sleep at night, and was right glad that he stayed at home, and sent out Franz with the Englishman yesterday."

"You feared, perhaps, that Seppel once out on the mountain, might be tempted to —"

"Oh, no, I did not think of him," said Rosel; "you know he has gone to invite his people to our betrothal."

"And this is not the way to the Kerbstein lake," said Nora.

"Not — the — shortest," answered Rosel, with some hesitation; "yet not much out of the way either; but I can trust Seppel now, and even if he did pass by the alp, it would be with no unlawful intention."

Nora walked on in silence, so occupied with her thoughts that she took but little notice of the surrounding scenery, until startled by a loud shout from their guide, then she perceived that they had reached the base of the walls of rock that formed the summit of the mountain, while beneath her, with its deserted chalets and rockbound nameless lake, lay the Wild Alp. There was a gloomy grandeur in the scene that Nora had not expected; no tree or shrub grew on the steep shore of the emerald green lake, in the wonderfully clear waters of which every cleft in the surrounding rocks was reflected; no rivulet poured itself into the tranquil basin, nor was there any apparent outlet for the water — supplied by hidden springs; equally secret channels conveyed the superfluous water through the adjoining mountains, leaving the lake in unruffled serenity, and rendering distinctly visible the sand, stones, rocks, and

plants that afforded refuge to shoals of large and thriving fish.

Nora descended to the lake, clambered along the pathless shore, until she reached the deserted hut of a charcoal-burner, and there remained while her companions went on to the *châlets*, which were at some distance, on a rising ground. She heard Michael's gay jodel long after he was out of sight, then a pause, followed at intervals by shouts of four or five notes in a descending scale, leaving time between them for an answer, after which all was still.

Had the prisoners called for help, and been able to make themselves heard? Nora thought so, and began slowly to mount the cow path, now dry and hard, but perfectly answering the description given her by Walde-mar of the places called cows' stockings; she soon, however, found a way to the short green grass of the alp, and, by a slightly circuitous path, was enabled to ascertain that the door of the nearest *châlet* was open.

Let not the reader suppose that the word *châlet* is here used to designate a building such as is known in England by this name, or that of Swiss cottage; the common appellation in Tyrol and Bavaria for these dwellings is *Senner* hut, — *senner* (herd and dairy-man), being usual in the former, and *Sennerin* (herds and dairy-maid) almost universal in the latter. Perhaps the proper word in English is cowherd's cot; but these words would scarcely give a correct idea of the picturesque summer residences of the Bavarian highland herds-woman. The small gable front, with its door and window at each side, is of stone and whitewashed; the loft above is of wood, as also the long adjoining cow-house; and all are under the same low overhanging roof of shingles, kept

steady by stones of dimensions calculated to defy the storms that rage round the exposed place in winter. Generally a wide extent of the greenest pasturage surrounds these senner huts: on the Wild Alp the herbage seemed to have sprung up among rocks; it was short, thick, and to the eye of the botanist presented a vegetation quite different from that of the plains, or even the valleys at the base of the mountains. No garden or glass-house can furnish more beautiful plants than are here to be found forcing their way through moss, or the clefts in the rocks, creeping round the decayed roots of trees, or luxuriating in the damp atmosphere of some ever-flowing spring. Nora clambered up among the rocks, and had gathered a handful of these wonderfully delicate flowers, when Rosel suddenly appeared at the door of the hut, with raised arms, called loudly to her, and then, with both hands pressed to her forehead, rushed impetuously down the slope, before Nora had time to descend from her elevated position.

The poor girl's passionate vehemence was so great, that her relation of what had occurred would have been perfectly unintelligible to Nora had she not previously been so well informed. She was still standing on a fragment of rock, as Rosel ended her recital by a burst of tears, and the not unexpected information that her brother Franz had recognised Seppel among the wild hunters, and had vowed he would have him prosecuted, if only to prevent his sister from marrying an incorrigible wildschütz, who would bring disgrace on them hereafter, and being in league with the Tyroleans, might, for all they could tell, have been the accomplice, if not himself the villain who had shot their brother Philip.

"As if," — she sobbed, "as if Seppel would ever

have entered our house, or spoken a word to me, after committing such a crime!"

"Don't make yourself unhappy about so preposterous an accusation;" said Nora, consolingly; "your brother spoke in anger, and does not, I am sure, entertain the slightest suspicion of the kind. That Seppel was one of the wild hunters is possible — is probable — and we must endeavour to accommodate matters as well as we can, and persuade Franz to forgive —"

"Oh, he won't forgive," cried Rosel, interrupting her, "I know he won't — for he says that Seppel singled him out, and rushed upon him with a fury that was perfectly incomprehensible."

"But," said Nora, thoughtfully, as they walked towards the hut together, "but he cannot prove that it was Seppel, for I suppose he took the usual precaution of disguising himself?"

"His face was blackened," answered Rosel, "but Franz said he could not be mistaken in the tall figure, and thick black hair, and large white teeth, and he is ready to swear that it was Seppel and no other."

"He had better not," rejoined Nora, "for Seppel may be able to prove that he was at the Kerbstein lake with his relations when your brother was taken prisoner. What did Mr. Torp say?"

"The Englishman!" exclaimed Rosel, confused, "I don't know, I did not see him, I never thought of him. Michael helped me to cut the cords that bound Franz, who was so fierce and wild that he quite frightened me, and put everything else out of my head."

She had not quite finished speaking, when her brother suddenly appeared before the hut, and directly afterwards darted past them, with a velocity that rendered

all attempts to arrest his progress ineffectual. Where the ground had been rendered rough and uneven by the cattle, he stopped, bent down, appeared to rub his ankles in an impatient, hasty manner, and then moved on with a very perceptible limp. Rosel started forward — turned round — spoke a few agitated, scarcely intelligible words to Nora about the necessity of following her brother — rushed after him without waiting for an answer, and a few seconds afterwards they disappeared together behind the rocks.

At the door of the hut stood Torp and Michael, not a trace of displeasure on the face of the stoical Englishman. Nora bowed slightly, sat down on the bench outside the house, and leaned back against the wall, as if determined to rest after her fatiguing walk.

Now though Mr. Torp chose to be haughty and repulsive to every member of the Nixon family, he could be very much the contrary with other people, and Nora found him talking in the most unaffectedly familiar manner to her guide.

"I believe after all," he said, glancing downwards at his feet, "that I was quite as firmly bound as Franz, but my boots saved my ankles, and by remaining quiet I spared my wrists. All things considered they behaved well enough, brought me my cigars that had dropped out of my pocket during the scuffle, and told me I should find my rifle in the cellar."

"And," said Michael, in a confidential tone, "and do you too think that long Seppel from the Craggs was one of them?"

"If you mean the tall cuirassier, with the black hair," replied Torp, "I think he was."

"No wonder the forester's Rosel took on so," observed Michael.

"She seems a good girl," said Torp, "and did all she could to pacify her brother, — at least as well as I could hear what they said from the inner room, for Franz quite forgot me in the first burst of his wrath."

"He had cause enough for his anger," observed Michael, "if so be that Seppel did indeed single him out, and fall upon him at once with all the signs of the bitterest enmity."

"I was too busily engaged myself, to observe what happened to Franz," answered Torp; "but I dare say his sister will make him pardon this affront, for after all it is little else."

"She may follow him all the way home, and go down on her knees to him, and he will not pardon this insult," said Michael. "I heard him tell her that he could have excused the attack under the circumstances, knowing how much Seppel had at stake; and had he only been overpowered by numbers and made prisoner, why it was not more than might happen to any one; but that as long as he lived he never would forgive or forget Seppel's coming back to the hut after the others were gone, standing grinning at him when he lay helpless on the floor, and then brutally spurning and kicking him, as if he had been a cur or reptile that he longed to destroy."

"Impossible! he never could have acted so!" cried Nora, starting from her listless posture, and looking up with an expression of so much surprise and concern that Torp opened his eyes wide in wonder at the interest so openly avowed by his countrywoman for a notorious Wildschütz.

"These were the assistant forester's own words to his sister," said Michael, "and grief enough they caused her."

"He must have been out of his senses, unconscious of what he was doing," began Nora.

"Well," said Michael, "it's not unlikely that he did take a glass too much of Tyrolean wine. We are more used in beer than wine in Bavaria, and it may have got into *his* head, though the others did not feel it. The son-in-law of the sexton at St. Hubert's, who lives at the other side of the frontiers, has good wine, I am told, for his friends, and the gentleman here says there were four from Tyrol with Seppel."

"*Three*," interposed Torp, with strong emphasis, "the fourth was certainly not a Tyrolean."

"One of the boys from our village?" asked Michael.

"I think it very likely that he came from Almenau," answered Torp, his eye resting on Nora, while he spoke with so much meaning that she perceived he already began to suspect that she had been sent to release him.

The interest excited in her mind by the recent occurrence was, however, on Rosel's account, too great to allow her to think of herself, or even John, at that moment; she therefore looked up without embarrassment, and observed, "It is so much more likely that Seppel would endeavour to keep in the background, and avoid being seen on this occasion, that I am inclined to think that Franz, after the first attack, may have mistaken one of the Tyroleans for him. He did not speak, of course?"

"A few words to me," said Torp; "but I do not know his voice."

"Well," said Michael, after a pause, "I wonder if

they will be able to prove anything against him this time. Often and often has he been brought before the judge, but was always dismissed for want of sufficient evidence against him. If he can contrive to mystify them all this time, why he has the devil's own luck, and they may as well let him alone in future."

"Yet," observed Nora, "the accusation will, I fear, be sufficient to injure his prospects materially. The forester may refuse to give him his daughter, and even Rosel herself —"

"Oh! as to Rosel," said Michael, winking knowingly to Torp, "that will make no difference to her, she likes him all the better for being a scape-grace. It's the way with the girls about here, the wilder a fellow is the more they like him."

Torp looked amused, and Michael continued: "Sep-pel's what they call here a fresh boy, 'a frisher,' who never tapped at a window that it was not opened, who never turned into an alp-hut that the best milk and butter was not set before him; and certain it is that no sennerin could ever be made to remember having seen him hunting, or even carrying a rifle."

"You are speaking of many years ago," said Nora, "for since he has been in the army no young man could be steadier."

"He was a cuirassier in the year forty-eight, and took his pleasure on the mountains here as well as any — of us."

"In that year there was no law to prevent the peasants from hunting," observed Nora.

"And a pretty mess they made of it," interposed Torp.

"It was about that time," said Michael, "that I was

engaged by the forester as one of the charcoal-burners at the clearance above the Trift Alp, part of which belongs to the miller, whose handsome daughter was there that year as *sennerin*."

"I was not aware," observed Torp, "that the peasants sent their daughters on the alps as *sennerins*."

"Often enough about here," answered Michael. "If they go with free will and for pleasure, as many of them do, they call it their '*sommer frish*,' and fresh enough the *sennerins* were that same year. The Trift Alp is on the frontiers, half Tyrolean, half Bavarian; the miller's Madeleine was there, and Afra, a smith's daughter from Tyrol, that some said was even handsomer. At all events a more frolicsome pair were never seen, and the talk of their beauty was so great that the boys came from far and wide to see them, and none more often than Sepp from the Crag."

"High and low, all — all the same," soliloquized Nora. "He had pledged his troth to Rosel that very year!"

"We found out afterwards," continued Michael, with a laugh, "that he was all the while out after a chamois that was hovering about the frontier."

"Oh, I'm glad to hear that," she said, quickly.

Torp smiled and looked towards her, but she did not observe him.

"And didn't we tease the girls afterwards about him," continued Michael, "and didn't Madeleine chafe and fume at his hypocrisy, as she called it; and the very next time he tapped at her window only opened it to call him a scamp, and then banged it to with such force that every pane of glass was smashed to atoms!"

Torp and Nora laughed simultaneously. "And what did Seppel do then?" she asked.

"He went on to Afra's, but she neither opened window nor door, and only answered his call by wishing him a pleasant hunt."

"And then?" asked Nora.

"He ate his schmarn at old Nandls, and shared her coffee, and made light of the girls' anger, and said he'd send a lad to Madeleine to mend the window; and sure enough the next day up came Black Seppel from the mill, and was well received, though as dull and dismal a fellow as could be found, even in his country."

"I never heard that the Tyroleans were dull and dismal," observed Torp.

"An earnest people, or at least very little given to cheerfulness, we consider them at this side of the mountains," said Michael; "and the more south you go the less you hear of singing and dancing, until at last both seem forgotten, and a wedding is about as gay as a funeral."

"I believe they avoid all unnecessary revelry from religious motives," began Torp, "and are, perhaps, somewhat fanatical —"

"Eh? what's that?" asked Michael.

"I mean their religion is of rather a gloomy description, but they are an interesting people; the women handsome, the men courageous, and the best marksmen I ever met; not even the Swiss can surpass them in the handling of a rifle."

"Well, I don't think we're behind hand in that way in Bavaria," said Michael. "I could name a good many in Almenau who have brought home prizes from Tyrol. No one can deny that they are steady marksmen at the

other side of the mountains, but they are tardy in taking aim. Slow and sure is their motto, and when a Tyrolean is in the shooting-stand he is in no hurry to leave it. At a target we fire five shots to their three."

"Of course," said Torp, "there is a good deal of rivalry between the two countries on this subject?"

"No doubt of it," answered Michael, laughing, "and about other matters too."

"Which," said Torp, "causes occasional skirmishing at the inns most probably."

"Often enough formerly," answered Michael; "but we can get up a row without the Tyroleans, and require small provocation to take up the cudgels and lay about us. I've got into trouble myself for a trifle."

"And," said Nora, "besides the wounds given and received in these battles, accidents with fire-arms must be of quite common occurrence here. How can it be otherwise, with guns in every house, and boys longing to use them, after hearing men boasting continually of their prowess out hunting or at target-shooting matches."

"Yet I don't remember any accident ever happening in our neighbourhood," said Michael, "excepting Black Seppel's, and that was in Tyrol."

"What happened to him?" asked Nora.

"One day, about seven years ago, when he was trying a new rifle behind his father's mill, his younger brother came springing towards him unawares, and received a wound in his neck that caused him to bleed to death. Seppel left home, it is supposed, for this reason, and entered into service at our miller's, where he has been ever since, and remains, they say, for love of the miller's daughter. At all events, he has never since touched a rifle, goes out of the way whenever there is a

shooting-match, and I shouldn't like to be the man to ask him why he dislikes the smell of powder."

"I wish he would go back to Tyrol," said Nora; "he is exceedingly in the way just now, and Madeleine does not care for him in the least."

"Doesn't she?" cried Michael. "I've heard her say often enough that she liked him, and why she liked him."

"You seem to know her well," observed Nora.

"Are we not from the same village?" asked Michael, "and is not that next to being of the same family? She liked Black Seppel just because he was disliked by everybody else, and especially because he was morose to all the world but herself."

"And who is this Madeleine?" asked Torp, with some curiosity.

"The mountain miller's daughter," answered Nora, rising; "and I am afraid I must add as perfect a coquette as you could find in any London or Paris ball-room."

"Stay, Miss Nixon," cried Torp, perceiving her about to leave them, "or at least before you go have the charity to give me some of the provisions that are so temptingly protruding from your guide's green bag."

"I ought to have thought of that before," said Nora, turning into the hut, "and poor Franz has gone off hungry in all probability!"

"Franz filled his pockets with bread before he left us," said Torp; "and I confess to having stolen a couple of sandwiches, for after having fasted upwards of four-and-twenty hours, the temptation was more than I could resist. I cannot remember ever being so hungry — so ravenously hungry — as at this moment," he added, seating himself on the low hearth, and beginning to eat

with so apparent an appetite that Nora continued laughingly for some time to supply him, altogether forgetful of herself or her guide.

"What a profusion of provisions!" he remarked, at last, when she had spread the whole contents of the bag before him. "Quite a banquet for an alp party!" and as his eyes rested on a bottle of wine, and a couple of small tumblers, he added, "One might almost suppose you had had a sort of presentiment, Miss Nixon, that half-famished prisoners would require your good offices!"

Nora saw a provokingly meaning smile playing round his lips, and the eyes that had disconcerted Jack and his companions by their scrutinizing glances seemed very much inclined to try their power on her.

"When I desired Rosel to pack up these things," she answered, quietly, "neither you nor your companion were in my thoughts I can assure you. We intended to have made a family party to one of the lower alps near the village, and the wine especially was intended for —" she stopped, not choosing to betray herself by saying the word "uncle."

"For the old gentleman who fishes at St. Benedict's," interposed Michael, as distinctly as his crammed mouth would permit him to articulate.

"Exactly," said Nora.

"And you changed your plan — aw — suddenly — perhaps yesterday evening?" persisted Torp.

"You may remember having heard your friend M. Waldemar recommend me to visit this alp before a change of weather made it inaccessible," she answered, "and fortunately for you I have followed his advice."

"Change of weather," he repeated, "not much chance of that I should think."

"I would not take upon me to answer for this evening," observed Michael, glancing towards the open door, "those light streaky clouds denote storm."

"Perhaps we had better leave the alp at once," proposed Nora, hastily; "I confess I should not like to be weather-bound here."

"We have had clouds like these continually during the last fortnight," said Torp, "and you will be dreadfully tired, Miss Nixon, if you do not rest after your fatiguing walk before you attempt the not easy descent of this mountain."

Nora said she could rest more pleasantly at the shore of the lake than in the hut, and left them, rather glad on any pretence to escape the further questionings of Torp.

CHAPTER VI.

The Forester's Bridge.

TORP would have been little flattered had he known with what extreme satisfaction Nora left him to the society of her guide. It had become quite evident to her that he suspected Jack of having assisted in taking him prisoner; and though his wish to obtain some certainty on the subject was natural enough, his quiet attempts to embarrass her had been, to say the least, disagreeable, as she felt very doubtful as to the use he might make of any proof of Jack's guilt, or her connivance, that he might be able to procure. Had Waldemar been in his place, she would without hesitation have told him all she knew of the vexatious affair, and would have requested his good offices for Seppel, and complete forgiveness of Jack's share in the exploit, al-

most with the certainty that neither would be refused her. Torp's cool self-possession repelled confidence, and her experience led her to consider him a hard, worldly-minded man, who would undoubtedly call a wildschütz a poacher, and let the law take its course. Her best plan, then, was to avoid him; and as she thought it was probable that the little lake would have more interest for him than any other spot in the neighbourhood of the hut, and might tempt him out even in the noontide heat, she turned her steps in a contrary direction, mounted the rising ground behind the huts, and soon reached the base of the chain of rocks that gave the alp itself the wild appearance whence it derived its name.

Among these rocks, Nora climbed with unrelaxing perseverance, until she came to a height from which she could see a great part of the Bavarian Highlands, and far into Tyrol: then seating herself in a sheltered spot, she overlooked at her leisure a world of hill and dale, forest and rocks, — the last named in such masses, and of such wild and fantastic forms, that they must have surprised even those accustomed to such scenes. Mountain on mountain rose innumerable, some rounded, some conical, others long ridged, but almost all with high rocky summits occasionally starting abruptly out of the pine-forest, but more frequently allowing the eye to follow the gradual cessation of vegetation, until the bare stone rose sharply against the blue sky. No stretch of the imagination was required to discover what appeared the ruins of gigantic strongholds or watch-towers: it was rather necessary to call reason to assist the sight, in order to be convinced that the hands of men could never have constructed buildings of such proportions in such places. To an English observer the most striking

objects in the view would have been the immense extent of forest, the ultramarine blue of the distant heights, and the long region of eternal snow and ice beyond. For Nora, these objects possessed *not* the charm of novelty, but the far — far more deeply felt attraction of strong resemblance to similar scenes indelibly impressed on her memory, and treasured in her heart of hearts for ten long years, — serving as solace in hours of London solitude, when the chimneys of the neighbouring houses, and the dusky sky above them, had wearied her eyes and dulled her senses.

That part of Nora's life was now in its turn beginning to appear like a dream — its monotony giving the delusion plausibility, so that the events of a decennium dwindled easily into the recollections of half an hour, while previous years expanded, and bright visions of childhood and early youth flitted before her. Half reclining on the small patch of moss that she had chosen as resting-place, hours might have passed, and in fact did pass unobserved by her. The sun was high in the heavens, — the rocks no longer afforded any shade, but rather seemed to attract his beams, causing a feeling of intolerable heat, — the fresh current of air that scarcely ever fails on the alps was replaced by an oppressive calm, — when Nora, at length, started from her recumbent posture, and sat upright, her hands clasped round her knees as she gazed intently about her. Had she been sleeping? dreaming? She could not think so, — for those fields of snow had not been lost sight of, but had rather given rise to a long train of recollections ending at the Gross Venediger, on which she now looked. Years ago, when travelling through the valley of Pinzgau, she had passed a night at Mittersill,

near that glacier, and had first seen it with the gorgeous background of a summer evening sky. When they had arrived at the inn, every one had been occupied with preparations for the ensuing day, on which the *primitz* of a young priest was to take place. They called it his *primitz*, that is, *prima missa*, — first time of reading mass; and as he was the son of a peasant in the neighbourhood, he had chosen the inn at Mittersill for the celebration of the fête usual on such occasions. The guest-chamber and staircase had been decorated with green wreaths, a room near the kitchen contained a row of tables covered with dishes full of flour, eggs, sweet-meats, pounded sugar, and other ingredients, that only awaited the dexterous hand of the cook to change their nature and their name. As if it were but yesterday, Nora remembered having entreated her mother to allow her to be present the next morning at the ceremony in the church, and the landlady's good-natured offer to take charge of her. "My little daughter Marie," she said, "is to be his reverence's bride. He knew what he was about when he chose her, for, of course, I shall do something handsome towards his future house-keeping, to say nothing of my husband, who is his cousin." Nora's father and mother had talked much during the evening of the custom of celebrating the *primitz* of a priest as if it were a marriage, of the useful presents given by the parents of the brides, and much more that she had not understood; but in the morning "his reverence's bride" had come to waken her, and greatly had she admired the demure, rosy-cheeked little girl, scarcely seven years old, and her fresh muslin frock and wreath of white flowers placed like a coronet on her head. The procession to the church had been long and pompous, the

crowd there dense, and universal and deep the devotion pictured in the faces up-turned, or the heads bowed reverently to receive the blessing of the agitated young man, who, with raised arms and flushed cheeks, looked down from the pulpit on a congregation above whom his recent vows had placed him so immeasurably high. As the crowd dispersed, Nora's attention had been directed towards the glacier by hearing some peasants observe that the "Venediger," was putting on his cap, and they might expect a change of weather before long — and as it had then appeared to her so it was now. A light mist seemed to hover about the summit, rendering the outline indistinct, and spreading along the snow fields in a shadowy manner, that made it difficult to decide whether the vapour rose from the snow or was drawn downwards towards it. The more distant glaciers were soon lost to sight, and, as if at a given signal, clouds gathered round most of the adjacent peaks, and higher mountain ridges. All this was at first so distant — so far away in Tyrol — that Nora watched the lights and shadows, and the changes produced in the scenery with delight and interest, undisturbed by a thought of her own position, until some long light clouds began to rest on the summits in her immediate vicinity, and wreaths of white transparent vapour rose from, and hovered over the wooded acclivities. Then she commenced a quick descent of the rocks, and met her guide, who said that he and the English gentleman had been looking for her at the lake, and that they had not a moment to lose, if they hoped to get partly down the mountain before the storm commenced.

"Perhaps," said Torp, who was standing with folded arms on a prominent crag, and looking along the horizon

with such engrossing attention that he did not even turn round while speaking, "Perhaps it would be better to await the storm here, Michael; it seems to me nearer than you supposed; and Miss Nixon will scarcely be able to reach in time the shelter of the first houses on the mountain, though we might manage it by making a violent exertion."

"I am a very good walker," said Nora, rather alarmed at the prospect of spending the night in the hut.

"The alp is greatly exposed," observed Michael, "and in a few hours may be covered with snow. If the sennerins were still here the young lady might stop in the hut for a day or two pleasantly enough; but without provisions we could not attempt it now. The rain that's coming will be no summer shower, I can tell you; and what with the bare rocks on this side, and the waterfall across the way on the other, and the river flooded below, it might be long before any one could reach us, or we make our way down the mountain with the young lady, though she did climb it as well as the queen herself could have done!"

Nora smiled, and observed that climbing a mountain like a queen was very dubious praise.

"Not in Bavaria, Miss Nixon," said Torp, "as Michael would explain to you at some length, if we had time to listen to him."

"Then," said Nora, "having heard that I mounted so well, you will scarcely doubt my being able to descend also, and if we hurry forward, perhaps we may reach the peasant's house, where the corn was still green."

"Let us try at least to get past the waterfall before the rain comes down upon us," exclaimed Michael, springing on to the hut.

He reappeared with Torp's rifle slung over his shoulder, and busily employed burying in the recesses of his green pouch the small remains of their recent repast.

A few minutes afterwards they were on their way to the lake, which Nora scarcely looked at in her eagerness to leave the valley of the alp and reach a more elevated spot, where she could better judge of the state of the weather, and see the approach of the storm.

"This is really a magnificent sight!" cried Torp, soon after, warmed into a sort of enthusiasm, as once more the long range of mountains became visible.

"What a change," said Nora, contrasting in her mind the blue sky, cloudless mountains, and sunny valleys that she had seen from the same place but a few hours previously; "what a complete change of scene! One might almost expect to see Woatin himself appear among that chaos of clouds."

"You mean the wild huntsman, miss," said Michael; "people say he is out regular in the thunder-storms at the change of the season, and this may be the last summer storm. I suppose," — he added, half-interrogatively — "I suppose it's the queer-shaped clouds that give rise to the saying about the wild hunt?"

"Not exactly," answered Nora; "Woatin was, I believe, supposed to be the god of thunder, and has in some way been confused with the wild huntsman. I wish whichever brings the last summer storm, would at least delay his appearance until we were safely down the mountain."

"And I," said Torp, "wish I could remain here and watch the coming of this storm, which is the very grandest thing I ever saw in my life."

"Are you deterred from remaining on account of the waterfall?" asked Nora. "I am quite sure the danger has been exaggerated, for it would require hours of rain to produce a flood that would fill the space beneath the wooden bridge I passed over on my way here."

"You are not aware," answered Torp, "that the water has been kept back for the woodfall. A few days ago Franz showed me the place that had been dammed up, and the felled wood piled up beneath it. The reservoir was at that time nearly full of water, and he said a few hours' rain such as might be expected after this sultry weather would burst the temporary sluice, and save him the trouble of sending up men to hew it down."

"I thought," said Nora, "that most of the timber about here was sledged down the mountain in winter."

"Water carriage is always the cheapest," answered Torp; "enormous quantities can be conveyed, without either expense or trouble, down the mountain with the fall of the water; and once in the river below us, it will work its way to the neighbourhood of Almenau, where a grating across the stream stops its further progress, unless it be considered desirable to give it free passage to another place."

While they were speaking, a thick white cloud began to wreath itself round the mountain on which they stood, its motion scarcely perceptible as it rolled along, avoiding the bright sunbeams that still lingered on the summit. As the heavens above lowered, valley after valley darkened into deepest shade, a struggling ray of light resting last of all but for a moment on the white steeple of a secluded pilgrimage chapel that had failed to attract the eye in brighter hours. Torp and

Nora watched with intense interest the last array of clouds that, rushing across the sky, at length effectually obscured the sun's disk, and caused an indescribable gloom to fall on all around them. Distant lightnings darted through the leaden-hued firmament, and in the direction of the Wild Alp a long stripe of green coloured sky made itself remarkable.

"That looks like a hail storm," said Michael, uneasily. "Indeed, Miss Nora, it would be better if you moved on and tried to pass the waterfall before it comes to the worst. In a very short time we shall not be able to see a yard before us, and when you come to the narrow path, with a wall of rock on one side and a steep fall at the other —"

"I had forgotten that place," said Torp, interrupting him, "and wish for your sake, Miss Nixon, that we had taken our chance of starvation in the hut. Franz would have managed, I am sure, to get to us some way or other. Even now," he added, stopping suddenly, "even now we might turn back, and at least secure shelter from a storm that may cause you more discomfort than the wetting for which you are of course prepared."

"Yes — go back — do," chimed in Michael, eagerly; "and early to-morrow morning, let the weather be what it may, I shall return here with provisions, and Franz and his father; and it will be odd if we can't find some way of bringing you home in safety." He had unslung his green pouch while speaking, and held it towards Torp.

"No, no, no," cried Nora, "it is not to be thought of: go on. I shall follow you as carefully as I can. If I fall you must help me up again, and for a shower bath of some hours' duration I am fully prepared."

"On then," said Torp, without the slightest attempt to urge an acceptance of his proposal.

And on Michael went, followed recklessly enough by Nora, who did not choose to be the cause of delay when every moment was of consequence. They had all ceased to look round them, or speak, and were just within sight of the wilderness of rocks around the fall, when a few gusts of wind put the clouds above and below them into commotion, and a few seconds afterwards an impenetrable mist enveloped them. The guide preceding them shouted, Torp answered, and Nora sprang on between them with a fearlessness that was very satisfactory to the latter.

"Keep to the left, Miss Nixon," he said, as the first burst of the tempest swept past them, and the wind seizing her hat nearly tore it from her head.

"To the left — to the left," he repeated, springing towards her; but the words were unintelligible, and at all events Nora was too much occupied with efforts to retain a covering for her head in such inclement weather to pay much attention to anything else. In vain, however, she raised both hands, and struggled with the wind; the straw yielded in all directions, and even while Torp was speaking, the hat was borne aloft, and she had made an equally fruitless and imprudent attempt to snatch at it.

Another blast of the storm whirled her round until she became perfectly giddy; but she was not immediately aware that, when raised from the ground, the path was no longer beneath her feet, and that she was on her way down the mountain precisely at the spot chosen by the wildschütz for his desperate slide. The first horrible consciousness of her danger flashed across her mind on finding herself flung on a heap of sand and gravel, that,

without affording her a moment's support, began to glide downwards, carrying her, amidst a cloud of dust and sand, clumps of loose earth and a shower of gravel, towards the river that she had in the morning seen dashing in cascades among the rocks at the foot of the mountain.

Down, down, down she was carried with a rapidity that increased every moment. Being unhurt, she long retained both consciousness and presence of mind; made no resistance where the fall was hopelessly steep; and endeavoured to grasp whatever seemed likely to arrest her progress, when the decreasing velocity enabled her sufficiently to distinguish surrounding objects. She did not despair even when a deafening hurriance swept through the ravine, carrying with it large branches of trees, and raising the sand about her in palpable masses; but when the forked lightning dazzled, and the instantaneously following thunder pealed above her head — when she once more felt herself raised from the ground and borne along without the power of resistance, a feeling of utter helplessness took possession of her mind; she expected instantaneous death, or horrible mutilation; and, murmuring a prayer, had scarcely touched the trunk of a fallen tree before she became completely senseless.

How long she remained in this state she never could ascertain; her return to consciousness was, perhaps, accelerated by the furious raging of the wind, and unceasing rolling of thunder, that was echoed a hundred-fold by the surrounding mountains. When she again opened her eyes, Torp was bending over, and watching her, with an expression of such intense anxiety, that a natural impulse made her sit upright and look round her.

"Are you much hurt?" he asked, gravely.

"I — think — not," she answered, putting her hand to her head.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed, fervently; "for never in my life was I so horror-struck as on seeing you lying there, apparently dead."

"I have, indeed, had a most miraculous escape," said Nora, rising slowly, and supporting herself against the stem of a tree.

"If you can walk, let us leave this place," cried Torp, quickly, as he heard the crashing of falling timber behind them, and observed some young fir-trees rolling past, that had evidently just been turn up by the roots. "We are in actual, immediate danger here, and ought to endeavour to cross the fall before the rain cuts off our retreat."

He gave her her mountain-staff, which he had found lying on the ground, seized her hand, and hurried from the unsafe shelter of the wood. But so violent was the tempest, that they had hardly staggered about a hundred yards towards the fall, when Nora was again thrown to the ground. The darkness of night seemed to overspread the sky; a few large, heavy drops of rain preceded a long, whistling gust of icy-cold wind, which was instantly followed by the most violent shower of hail that Nora and Torp had ever in their lives witnessed.

Let not the English reader suppose these hailstones were such as may be occasionally seen pattering against their plate-glass windows. They were compact masses of ice, like stones; and giving a blow that caused actual pain. Torp pulled off his shooting-jacket, and, throwing himself on the ground beside Nora, formed with it a partial shelter for her and himself — the more necessary

as they were both without covering for their heads — and there they sat together, resigned and silent, during the hailstorm, and immediately succeeding torrents of rain, which poured like a bursting cloud upon and around them. Sheets of water seemed borne along by the wind; and the noise caused by the rushing of the already-flooded river below, the still rolling thunder above, and the storm sweeping over the adjacent forests, at first prevented them from hearing the approach of the long-expected, and not a little dreaded woodfall, which they knew would cut off all communication with Almenau for many hours, and effectually prevent them from returning the way they had come.

When Torp started to his feet, the turbid torrent was thundering down the mountain-side, carrying stones, gravel, and sand, with blocks of wood, tossed wildly in all directions; and, while he and Nora were still retreating, the overflowing water spread to the sand on which they were toiling, ankle deep, half-blinded by rain, and blown about by the storm.

"This is hard work, Miss Nixon," said Torp, from whose manner every trace of coldness and indifference had disappeared; "and I am afraid there is still harder in prospect, if you expect to have a roof over your head to-night."

"I suppose," said Nora, as they once more stood in the doubtful shelter afforded by the trees, on the skirt of the wood, "I suppose there is no use in trying to climb the mountain, and regain our path?"

"None whatever," he answered; "we cannot ascend on the sand that is now under water; still less here, where the trees grow on terraces, separated by walls of rock. One could not easily have found a more in-

auspicious place for an accident such as you have met with. Fortunately, I know the country about here pretty well, from having fished in the river below us: we must cross it; and once on the woodmen's path, on the other side, a couple of hours will bring us to a few peasants' houses, where we can get a vehicle of some kind or other to take us on to our village before midnight."

"There is a bridge, I suppose —" began Nora.

"One of very primitive construction," answered Torp. "A couple of well-grown trees have been thrown across the stream, for the convenience of the foresters, but it will, I hope, save us from spending the night on the mountain."

While he was speaking, Nora had been employed in pushing back her long braids of platted hair, now without a comb to keep them in order.

"I am afraid," he added, on observing an expression of pain pass over her features, "I am afraid you have not escaped as unscathed as you at first supposed."

"Only a few bruises," she answered, cheerfully; "but we have no time to attend to such trifles now. The storm has abated; it is not to be expected that the rain will cease for some hours; so, if you will lead the way, you may depend on my making every effort to follow you."

He turned at once into the wood, through which they had to toil for some time, over rocks, protruding roots of trees, and an occasional morass of black, slippery earth. Torp at first frequently offered assistance; but it was invariably refused, with a decision that not only effectually silenced him, but, in the end, induced him to walk on, and only show his consciousness of Nora's pre-

sence by stopping at intervals to ascertain that she was keeping up with him.

On reaching a tolerably extensive clearing, Nora perceived that the ravine became narrower as they advanced, and that there was little more than space for the river between the mountains.

It was, however, but at intervals that she could see the foaming stream; for a succession of vapoury clouds rolled through the gorge, giving only occasional glimpses of the opposite mountain, and making it appear of fabulous height and grandeur. At times, she scarcely knew whether she were ascending or descending, so rocky and precipitous were the vast masses of mountain-wreck around her — so unceasing her efforts to pass over or among them, without receiving assistance from her companion.

At length they began a descent to the river; but were still about a hundred yards from it, when the forester's bridge came into view, greeted by Torp with an exclamation of pleasure — by Nora, with a start, and shudder of apprehension.

The trunks of two tall trees had been thrown across the water, where the stream was narrowed by the rocks; a succession of foaming cascades completely filling the upper part of the gorge, while in the lower the yellow flood spread itself out as far as the ground would permit, successfully undermining many a stately pine: some of these, already uprooted, were being borne off triumphantly by the stream, their green boughs stretching upwards, and waving in the distance, as if in despair, while others seemed to struggle hard for the privilege of death on their native soil; and, with roots entwined in those of the trees around them, resisted the violence of the waves,

and were not unfrequently flung by them above the level of the water, where, covered with sand, earth, and weeds, the rain poured in no longer refreshing torrents on their drooping branches.

"Halloo!" cried Torp, "the path is under water! What are we to do now?"

"I'm sure I don't know," answered Nora; "excepting there is some way of ascending the mountain on this side."

"Impossible, without climbing-irons," he said, looking upwards.

"I have pointed nails in the soles of my boots," she observed, stretching out a foot so covered with mud that the material of the said boots might have formed a subject of speculation — "regular hobnails, I assure you," she added, eagerly.

"So I supposed," said Torp, quietly; "otherwise you would not have been able to follow me as you have done this last hour. However, I am happy to say our situation is not so hopeless as you apprehend. I think — I hope — I can take you to the Kerbstein lake, on the frontier. In such weather as this, we shall require four — perhaps even five or six hours to get there; but the fisherman and his wife will give us shelter and dry clothes; and you will need both, I greatly fear, before we reach their house."

"Must I cross that — bridge?" asked Nora.

"Yes, — but I think I had better first try if it is all safe. In these sort of places it sometimes happens that the trees become decayed, and only the foresters are aware of —"

"Oh, then," cried Nora, interrupting him, "pray don't venture on it."

But he was already in the middle of the bridge, and putting its stability to the proof, by stamping his feet, and kicking away the remnants of mouldering bark and accumulated withered leaves that were likely to make it more perilous than it was already.

"All right, Miss Nixon," he said, returning to her: "you had better follow me as closely as you can, and hold my staff as a sort of rail; for these barkless old trees are confoundedly slippery, I can tell you."

"I know it," replied Nora; "yet were they anywhere but over that foaming water, I could walk upon them without the assistance of either your staff or mine."

"Of that," said Torp, "I have no doubt, after having seen you spring along the rocks on the shore of the lake to-day."

"A fall into such shallow water would have been of little importance," she answered; "but here —" she stopped, embarrassed.

"You think one might easily find a pleasanter place for a plunge than this just now," said Torp, smiling as he placed one of his feet on the bridge and held his staff towards her.

"Here it would be death," said Nora, "and a horrible death too; the very thought of it makes me giddy!" and she leaned over a rock and looked down into the river that immediately under the bridge flowed in an unbroken sweeping current.

"You must not look at the water if you are subject to vertigo," said Torp; "but I can scarcely think you are, after having seen you walk so fearlessly on the brink of a precipice not two hours ago."

"You forget," answered Nora, "that I had then a

wall of rocks on one side to give me at least a feeling of security, while here — “she paused, and then asked abruptly, “Is there no way of overcoming this sensation of giddiness? Surely when it is not caused by weakness or actual illness, a strong resolution must conquer it! I must not give way to such folly — go on, and I will follow you.”

“Take my staff to steady you,” said Torp, not quite liking the manner in which she changed colour, “and don’t look at the water.”

Nora took the staff, but before they had advanced half-a-dozen steps on the bridge, Torp felt it tremble so violently that he stopped.

“Go on,” said Nora faintly.

“Rather let us go back while we can,” he rejoined turning round and catching her arm.

Nora sprang from the bridge, covered her eyes with her hands, and exclaimed, in a tone of the deepest chagrin, “I cannot — cannot cross the river on those trees: they seemed to glide from beneath my feet, and the water to rise until I felt choking. Mr. Torp, you must go on to the lake without me, and send the fisherman and any peasants you can procure to take me out of this place.”

“I shall require at least four hours to reach the lake,” answered Torp; “the fisherman and his son four more to return here; and in the meantime you propose to sit alone and wait for them in this deluge of rain?”

“I dare say it will clear up presently,” said Nora, looking round her rather disconsolately.

“It will not,” replied Torp. “There is a fresh storm coming from the south-west, and even supposing you had a constitution to bear eight hours’ exposure in such

weather, without the necessary movement to save you from cold, it would be evening — night, in fact — before assistance could reach you. Few, excepting the foresters about here, could find their way to the lake after nightfall, and of what more use the fisherman and his son could be to you than I can, I am at a loss to discover."

"True, most true," said Nora, despondingly; "I only thought that with one at each side of me I should feel more secure perhaps —"

"I doubt it," said Torp; "and as to our remaining here all night, or my leaving you in such a place, it is not to be thought of. The case is urgent, Miss Nixon, and something must be done. Give me your handkerchief," he added, after a pause, "I believe I must blindfold you."

Nora drew her handkerchief from her pocket, and bound it herself over her eyes.

"Are you quite sure that you cannot see?" asked Torp.

"Quite," she answered, holding out her hands towards him in a groping manner, evidently expecting to be led forward.

A moment afterwards she felt an arm thrown round her, and found herself raised from the ground before she had time to utter a single word of expostulation. In another moment she knew they were on the bridge, knew that her feet were suspended over the water she had so much dreaded; but so strong was the arm, so steady the stride of her bearer, that not a particle of fear mixed itself with, or ameliorated, the acute sense of mortification she felt at having yielded to a weakness that had made such a step on his part a matter of necessity.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Nixon," said Torp, as he deposited her safely on the opposite side of the river; "I shall never take such a liberty again without permission, but it could not be helped this time."

"I am sure," answered Nora, greatly disconcerted, and blushing deeply, "I am sure I ought to be very much obliged to you."

"But you are not," said Torp, smiling, for he had been perfectly aware of her previous unwillingness to be assisted by him, "and," he added good humouredly, "there is no reason why you should be. The rest of the way, Miss Nixon, though long, would be pleasant and interesting enough in fine weather for so good a walker as you are, but in storm and rain like this a march across the mountains to the lake will probably prove an excursion that neither you nor I shall forget for some time."

Nora was already convinced of this as far as she was concerned, but she answered cheerfully that she was prepared for anything excepting passing over rivers on forester's bridges; and though the storm Torp had foreseen just then burst over their heads, she declined his proposal of seeking temporary shelter, and followed him up the steep rugged side of the mountain that rose abruptly before them. Not one word of complaint did she utter while scrambling through the pathless forest, heedless alike of the showers that the wind shook from the dripping trees upon her bare head and saturated clothes, or the slimy mud and treacherous moss that caused her to slide and slip, stumble and even fall repeatedly. They reached the ridge of the mountain; but, unable to see more than a few yards before her, Nora could only follow her companion as he wound round or

climbed over the rocks there, without having the slightest idea of the appearance of the country beyond or beneath the spot on which she stood. Their descent was rapid, and Torp showed considerable knowledge of human nature in general, and Nora's in particular, when a shallow turbulent stream was to be crossed, by splashing into it at once, and taking it as a matter of course that she could and would follow him though the water reached to her knees, and was of a rather repelling dirt colour.

A succession of marshy meadows succeeded, where the ground seemed of sponge, scarcely offering resistance enough to the foot or staff to afford a resting-place for one moment, the water springing up on all sides and forming a little pool in each footstep. The ascent of a number of hills was a relief, and a narrow pass beyond them, with a stony path through it, made Nora hope they were approaching some dwelling, until Torp informed her it was the cattle road to an alp already deserted; they should reach it in about an hour, he said, but in case she did not wish to rest there, they could pass by without going to the huts. If not too much for her he should recommend going on, as the lake was on the other side of the mountain on which the alp was situated, and it would be evening before they could reach it, at all events.

Nora made no objection. Wet through as they were, an uninhabited alp hut offered no advantage, and as yet the weather showed not the least likelihood of clearing up. Thunderstorms and showers succeeded each other unceasingly, the latter filling to overflowing the dried-up rivulets, and causing innumerable nameless waterfalls to foam down the mountain sides, or, blown into spray by

the tempest, to mix once more with the rain from which they had derived their origin. The clouds hung so low on the mountains that Torp could with difficulty find the way. Once they were obliged to turn back, and on another occasion to wait until a storm had passed over in order to look for the alp and mountain that lay between them and the lake.

These delays, the various impediments to be overcome, and the labour of walking on wet and slippery ground, or over loose stones, caused the evening to be far advanced before Torp, pointing downwards through a forest of trees, informed Nora that the lake was below them, and a little more than half an hour would take them to its shore. Invigorated by the intelligence, she hurried on through the darkening wood, on a path that in some places resembled a quagmire, in others was composed of flights of uneven stone steps, among which small rills meandered busily, or fell in tiny cascades. She no longer refused Torp's assistance when it was offered, and even during the last steep descent to the shore, placed her hand in his, or on his shoulder — precisely as he desired her.

At length they reached the lake, out of which the surrounding mountains rose abruptly on all sides but the one opposite to them. The full moon struggling hard with the lingering clouds of the last thunderstorm, and at times forcing a way through them, cast furtive floods of light on the water and the fisherman's lonely dwelling, which had been built on the only patch of pasture land in the neighbourhood. It resembled an alpine hut in its isolation and surrounding meadows, while the deep dark lake, and back-ground

of lofty mountains, gave a grandeur to its simplicity that rendered it picturesque in the extreme.

From the lower windows of the house bright gleams of red light were visible. Nora even thought she could distinguish the flickering flames on the kitchen hearth — but unfortunately the green fields, house, lights, and fires were on the opposite side of the lake, and Torp shouted long and loudly for a boat — in vain.

“They are at evening prayers, or at supper,” suggested Nora.

“Very probably,” he answered; “but if they are all praying aloud together, as the peasants generally do, I have little chance of being heard. The wind, too, is unfavourable — blows right into my mouth! I wish I could manage to alarm the dogs!” A succession of shrill whistles proving perfectly ineffectual, he added impatiently, “This will never do — we cannot stand shivering here in our wet clothes all night —”

“Can we not go round by the shore?” asked Nora.

“It is not possible,” he replied: “at one side of us the mountains descend into the water like well-built walls, on the other there is a river, now of course flooded, and — no bridge. Just walk up and down these few yards of level ground here, to keep yourself warm, Miss Nixon, while I make another effort to procure one of those scooped-out trunks of trees that the people about here call boats!”

Nora did as he requested, and unconsciously prepared her ears for a shout that would waken the echos far and wide — instead of which she heard a plunge into the lake, the splashing of water, and, on turning round, could but just distinguish Torp's head, as he swam out towards the middle of the lake.

He had thrown his shooting jacket and boots on the bank, and placed his purse and watch on a stone, and Nora, careless of his well-meant exhortation to keep herself warm by exercise, sat — no — she actually laid herself down on the wet grass beside them. She had not allowed Torp to perceive, but she now confessed to herself, that she was fatigued beyond measure; wayworn, weather-beaten, and exhausted, as she had never been before in her life.

The rain had ceased some time previously, and an occasional gleam of moonlight enabled her to follow the long furrow made in the water by the swimmer, so that she could judge pretty accurately of the time of his arrival at the boat-house. She once more heard him call the fisherman, but this time the response was quick and satisfactory, the door of the house opened, and men, women, children, and dogs rushed forth. A light glimmered in some one's hand, there was a confusion of voices, a barking of dogs, and not long after the steady sound of oars dipping regularly in the water.

An unshapely boat neared the shore, and on hearing Torp's voice, Nora instantly started to her feet. He was rowing vigorously, and when she entered the boat, and prepared to take a place in the stern, he observed, "If you know how to handle an oar, Miss Nixon, let me recommend you to take one now, and row across the lake, as the best preservative against cold."

Nora stepped across the bench, and took the oar out of the hand of the fisherman, notwithstanding the most earnest expostulations on his part, Torp, the while, neither interfering nor looking round.

Who can describe the surprise and curiosity of the assembled family standing at the boat-house to receive

them, when they landed on the other side of the lake? Who can enumerate the questions? The exclamations?

We decline the task, and leave all to the imagination of the reader.

CHAPTER VII.

A Modern Idyl.

It is to be hoped that Nora, and even Torp, have excited sufficient interest to make the reader unwilling to leave them at the door of the fisherman's house in the state described by Job as "Wet with the showers of the mountains." Nora's clothes were non only saturated with rain, but torn and soiled in a manner difficult to describe, and Torp had so recently emerged from the lake, that the water still trickled unceasingly from both his garments and hair.

The old fisherman, whose own curiosity had been in a great measure satisfied during his row across the lake, put an end to his wife's and daughter's questions and exclamations, by pushing them towards the staircase, and telling them to get dry clothes for the young lady — to give her the best they had, and the choice of their Sunday suits. He made the same offer on the part of his son to Torp, and the whole party began to mount the narrow steep stairs together.

While the fisherman's wife unlocked the door of her state room, Nora turned to Torp, and, with unusual warmth of manner, thanked him for having saved her from the calamity, if not peril, of passing the night without shelter on the mountains. "I am aware," she

added, "that you put yourself into danger by coming to my rescue."

"Not so much as you suppose, Miss Nixon," said Torp, interrupting her; "my fishing and hunting expeditions have made me tolerably well acquainted with the country hereabouts. For you there was undoubtedly danger had you remained alone, but, being together, there was none, excepting, perhaps, that of your not having strength to reach this place for the night."

Charmed at his so magnanimously making light of his services, and relieving her mind of a weight of care and annoyance thereby, Nora extended her hand with a smile, and said, "I have incurred a debt of gratitude nevertheless, which —" here she paused a moment, for Torp, who had taken her proffered hand, let it fall with a suddenness that surprised her, and he was already turning away, as she added, "which I can never in any way repay."

Though Torp's actions, and not his thoughts, have hitherto been chiefly deemed worthy of notice, the latter here deserve a place, to explain an ungraciousness so strongly in contrast to all he had said and done during the previous five or six hours. Alas for the vanity of human nature! — he had misunderstood the grateful glance of the dark eyes fixed on him so earnestly, and imagined nothing less than that he had found favour in them; and that, after the manner of sentimental young ladies, Nora might think it incumbent on her to bestow at least a portion of her heart on the man who had preserved her life! To put an end, therefore, to all such "stuff and nonsense," he scarcely looked at her while saying, "Really, Miss Nixon, you attach too much importance to this little adventure: the

small service rendered you this day, I should have considered it my duty, as a Christian and a man, to have offered to any one similarly situated."

"That ought not to lessen my sense of gratitude," rejoined Nora, in happy unconsciousness of the current of his thoughts; "and you must therefore allow me once more to thank you for having fulfilled the 'duties of a Christian and a man,' in a way so essentially serviceable to me."

"Pray say no more about it," cried Torp, with an impatient gesture. "You seem to have forgotten that you released me from a very unpleasant imprisonment this morning. If I have saved you from spending the night on the mountains, it is but a return for a benefit received, and there is no occasion for gratitude or thanks on either side."

Struck even more by the incivility of his manner than his words, Nora turned abruptly to the attendant peasants, who, with wondering eyes and half-open mouths, had been bewildered listeners of this dialogue, in a, to them, unknown tongue, and saying she should be much obliged for any clothes they would lend her, entered the low wooden-walled room with the fisherman's two daughters, leaving Torp to make similar arrangements with their brother.

Any one less acquainted with the Bavarian highlands than Nora, would have had little hope of finding garments fit for her use in the humble abode of an evidently very poor fisherman. She had observed that the house — low, and chiefly built of wood — was very old, and the interior stained to the darkest brown by age and smoke; that though the fisherman and his wife wore stockings, the others had only shoes, and

three or four little children had capered about on the wet grass before the house perfectly barefooted. Yet not for one moment did she doubt that from the gaily-painted wardrobes in the best room all her wants could be supplied; and she smiled, and expressed the admiration expected, when the eldest girl, with innocent ostentation, opened wide the doors of the linen press so as to exhibit all its treasures, and then, by mistake as it were, pulled out drawers containing green felt hats with gold tassels, black boddices, and flaming coloured neckerchiefs! Nora's patience was however rewarded at last by a choice of coarse but white linen, blue and white stockings, and printed calico, and bright coloured stuff petticoats. From the elder girl she borrowed one of the latter, as it suited her in length; from the younger, a slim maiden of thirteen, a black boddice and a scarlet and green kerchief; a pair of well-knit stockings took the form of her feet, but no shoes could be found in which she could walk, until, after having dried and freshly platted her hair, it occurred to the girls that "brother Hansl's new Sunday boots would not be a bit too small for the young lady;" and the Sunday boots of strong leather, double soled, well garnished with nails, and made to lace in front with thongs, were forthwith produced. Fortunately they proved neither too long, nor very much too wide; and Nora, perfectly convinced of the impossibility of ever again being able to make use of her own, was but too glad to avoid the contingency of being boot or shoeless the next day when the time came for her return to Almenau.

The passage outside the room was very dark, and as one of the girls remained behind to put everything in order again, and close the wardrobes, unceremoniously

retaining the light for that purpose, Nora laid her hand on the arm of the other, and so groped her way to the staircase. At the foot of it, a red-flamed guttering candle in his hand, stood the fisherman's son, and near him Torp, completely equipped as a peasant, and looking remarkably well in a dress peculiarly calculated to show to advantage his well-proportioned muscular figure. With his arms folded, and head thrown back, he leaned against the open door of the kitchen, and Nora asked herself, Was it possible that the calm, indolently lounging personage before her could be the man whose unremitting energy and athletic strength she had during the day, so much against her inclination, been forced to admire? Greatly she rejoiced that he had spurned her thanks, and reminded her so opportunely that she had released him from imprisonment. And it was true, quite true, that she had been brought into an unpleasant predicament, and some danger, by her effort to relieve him from a situation just as unpleasant, and nearly as perilous, as her own had been subsequently. In short, as he had himself observed, she had been useful to him, and he to her, and now they were mutually free from all obligation.

"Anything you please," said Torp at that moment, as if in answer to some question on the part of the fisherman's wife; "Give us anything you please, provided it be quickly. People who have not eaten for so many hours are not likely to be dainty, and a walk across the mountains from the Wild Alp in such weather would give any one an appetite."

The woman laughed, threw fresh wood on the hearth to hurry the process of cooking, and as the flickering flame lighted up Torp's features, he bore so strong a

resemblance to his mother, especially as Nora remembered her sitting by the fireplace at 'The Willows on the memorable last evening there, that all her bitter feelings towards his family, and personal dislike to himself, returned with double force, and she passed on in silence to the dwelling-room, thinking how much she could have enjoyed so pleasant a termination to her mountain adventure had any one but Torp been her companion.

The sitting-room at the fisherman's was like all such apartments in peasants' cottages; but the ceiling, composed of beams of wood darkened by age, was lower, and the windows smaller than in any room Nora had yet seen; and through the latter the moonlight entered sparingly, as for convenience and warmth, the winter store of fuelwood was piled against the walls of the house, merely leaving free the spaces occupied by the diminutive square window-frames. The fisherman and his younger children were seated on the wooden bench with which the sides of the great green tile stove were furnished. Above their heads, suspended on a rail, hung skirts both large and small, worsted stockings and leggings, airing in preparation for the pilgrimage to the distant church the ensuing morning.

The children moved near to their father when Nora entered, and whispered eagerly, "She's got Ursi's best green gown and Lina's new black boddice; and oh, father! they've been and given her Hansl's spick and span new boots."

The last words attracted the attention of a bare-legged boy who, sitting astride on the bench at the table, was watching intently the flame of the candle, evidently prepared with a pair of old rusty iron snuffers

to swoop down on the wick whenever it had attained a length that would enable him to do so without incurring a reprimand from his father. He turned round, slid nimbly from the bench, bent forward to ascertain the truth of what he had heard, and then, resting the forefinger of his left hand on his under teeth, sidled towards his father, all the while gazing at Nora from beneath his eyebrows, with a mixture of curiosity and dismay.

As she took the place he had vacated, and drew him towards her by his shirt-sleeve, for jacket he had none, Torp entered the room.

"Hans," cried the fisherman, "take your finger out of your mouth, and tell the young lady she's welcome to the loan of your boots."

"It will not be for long," said Nora, smiling, "and when I send them back to you, Hans, you will find something that you like packed up in the same paper with them. Can you guess whas it will be?"

Hans eyed her keenly, placed his thumbs beneath the faded green braces of his tightly-fitting black leather shorts, yielded to the impulse given by her hand, and, on finding himself standing close beside her, asked shyly, "Is it a harmonica?"

"I think it is," she answered, "but I don't exactly know of what kind."

"You put it in your mouth and blow music," he rejoined, more confidently; "there were hundreds of them at the fair in Tyrol, but — they cost twelve kreutzers."

"Ah, exactly," said Nora; "and if there be anything else you would like, I can send it by the same opportunity."

"A great, great, big, long, smoked sausage," said the boy, to Nora's infinite amusement, and evidently gaining courage as she nodded her head and told him to go on.

"And a — bouquetel of real flowers" (he meant a bouquet of artificial ones, but Nora understood him) — "a bouquetel of real flowers for my holiday hat! and a — a fishing-line — and — and hooks," he continued, eagerly placing his hand on her arm to secure her attention; for just at that moment his mother entered the room, carrying in her hand a steaming iron pan, fresh from the kitchen fire, and containing a quantity of the chopped omelette called "schmarn." She deposited it on a tripod, placed on the table for the purpose, motioned to Torp to advance, gave him and Nora each a horn spoon and an enormous slice of very dark brown bread, and then, placing her hands on her hips, uttered a sort of satisfied sigh, as she wished them a good appetite, and hoped they would not disdain what her poor house had to offer on so short a notice.

Nora not only reassured her, but flattered her vanity by immediately commencing to eat and praise with such thorough good will that the whole family began to gather round her, while Torp, silently helping himself to his share from the other side of the pan, glanced towards her occasionally with a sort of amazement that, unknown to himself, began to verge on admiration.

When the remains of their repast had been removed, and Nora turned from him to talk to the fisherman and his wife about their cattle and crops, and then to the latter of her homespun linen and the children's school attendance; to the fisherman's son of the forest clearings in the neighbourhood, and the occupation that

the sledging of the wood and charcoal gave the peasants in winter, Torp placed both his elbows on the table and leaned forward, surprised alike at her knowledge of such matters and the fluent highland *patois* in which she discussed them. He found himself wondering where she could have acquired both, when the fisherman drew him into the conversation by referring to his fishery, and describing his winter occupations. This subject interested Nora also, and she moved nearer to listen, taking up at the same time the ponderous half of a colossal blue stocking, and beginning to knit with a rapidity that only a German education could give.

For some reason which she would have found it difficult to explain, even to herself, Nora did not choose Torp to know how completely she was fatigued, so she forced herself to knit and listen until the effort became downright painful to her. The stocking seemed to widen immeasurably, and rise to her very eyes; the voices of the speakers sank into an indistinct murmur, like the hum of distant bees: one hand sought her forehead, to rub away the unwelcome drowsiness, but remained to support her drooping head; while the other, round which the blue thread was twisted in a manner incomprehensible to the uninitiated, at length fell powerless among the knitting-needles. A few faint struggles she made to raise her heavy eyelids, to look round her, to move, — in vain; overcome by weariness, she first slumbered lightly, then, slept profoundly.

The younger children had been taken off by their mother in succession; the elder girls had followed, and might be heard at work in the adjacent kitchen; the ticking of the clock in the wall became audible at intervals, for the fisherman alone continued to talk, Torp

having ceased for some time to answer, even in monosyllables. He was, however, not sleeping, or even sleepy — on the contrary, very wide awake, though he no longer heard the voice of the speaker, or took cognizance of anything in the room, save the slumberer opposite him. Perhaps he had been attracted by the white hand and arm, that appeared so strikingly inappropriate to the short, coarse linen sleeve; or the rounded figure, that gave so much grace to a rustic costume of most ordinary materials; or the fair face, in perfect repose; or the braids of shining black hair, or the long eyelashes, or — or — all together, perhaps. Certain it is that he might have seen Nora in London at fifty balls, and as many *déjeûnés*, in the most splendid dresses that can be imagined; or spent a fortnight under the same roof, in the most distinguished and popular of country-houses, without her having had the power to interest and fascinate him as she had done that day, during the storm on the mountain, and in the dwelling-room of the fisherman's lonely cottage.

And there was no mother or chaperon to put him on his guard, by looks of ill-concealed exultation; no relations to point out personal and hint mental perfections — not even a friend to laugh at him! But, after all, what danger could there be for a fastidious man such as he, in the contemplation of a Miss Nora Nixon — especially when she happened to be asleep? So Torp gazed on, in a pleasant, dreamy sort of way, until the fisherman rose to wind up the clock.

Nora opened her eyes, smiled drowsily, "believed she was rather tired," and left the room in search of a candle. A minute afterwards, he heard her speaking in the passage, and, on looking out through the half-

open door, soon discovered that she was making earnest inquiries respecting the time that the cuirassier, Seppel, had been with the fisherman's family.

"Not here until six o'clock in the morning? Did he come by the woodman's path, that was under water to-day; or — or by the Wild Alp?"

"By the Alp. He told us he had slept in the loft of one of the huts there for a couple of hours."

"But he may have left it very early," suggested Nora; "before daylight most probably, or even during the night — there was moonlight, you know."

"Oh, as to that, there's not a bye-way on the mountains unknown to him; but I suppose he wanted to find us all up and together, to hear his good news, or else he would have been sure to come on without stopping. Moonlight is his delight, and," added the fisherman's wife, with a knowing look, "Seppel has been often enough out in the mountains about here at night to find his way in the dark, if necessary."

"Was he alone?" asked Nora, gravely.

"Alone! of course he was. He came here to invite us to his betrothal."

"Are you quite sure," asked Nora, "that there were no 'boys' from Tyrol, or — other people with him?"

"Quite sure."

"And," continued Nora, hesitatingly, "he was not uneasy in his manner, or in a hurry to leave you?"

"By no means. He was as merry as a grig, and took a swim in the lake, and sang all the *Almenau schnader-hüpfeln*, and danced the *polky* as they do in Munich, and was as fresh, and fresher than ever I saw him in my life, and that's saying something!"

"Did he not say he had met people at the Alp?" asked Nora, slowly, as if unwilling to disturb the pleasant impression made on her by the last speech; "some hunters, I mean, who where there last night?"

"No," answered the woman, thoughtfully, and looking round to her son and elder daughters, as if for confirmation. "I don't think he mentioned anything about them; but he said he had heard the report of a rifle when on his way here. Six years ago I should have had my suspicions, and asked him some questions; but now he has grown steady, and wouldn't, on any account, anger his father-in-law that is to be. If you think he was out with wildhunters, miss, you're mistaken. I can answer for him."

"I hope you may be right," said Nora, slowly mounting the staircase, at the top of which she turned round to say good night.

Torp, less fatigued, was soon after tempted to step out on the balcony, where he remained among the flower-pots and fishing-nets nearly two hours, in apparent admiration of the lake, mountains, and moon. Why he afterwards went to his room, muttering the words "stuff and nonsense," we have not time to take into consideration.

CHAPTER VIII.

Post Horses bring the Idyl to a Conclusion.

WHEN Nora awoke the next morning, completely refreshed after a night of undisturbed rest, not a cloud was to be seen in the heavens. The mountains over which she had toiled the previous afternoon, together with those that enclosed so large a portion of the lake,

were already glowing in the first rays of the rising sun, and standing out clear and distinct from a background of the deepest blue, while the fisher-house still remained in complete shade. It was situated in the midst of green fields, at the entrance to a valley through which the overplus water of the lake found its way as a turbulent stream to the river Inn. There was pasturage in abundance for cattle, and a not inconsiderable herd were now in the neighbourhood of the house, collecting in groups round the hay-sheds on the meadows, before they commenced their daily wandering to the mountains. There clambering among the rocks or roaming in the woods, the sound of the deep toned bells suspended round their necks, gave constant indication of their whereabouts, and might be heard tinkling incessantly in the distance, until the loud, wild jodel of the fisher's daughter assembled them, towards evening, at the skirts of the wood. During the summer months they generally remained out at night, not unfrequently, in unusually warm weather, returning home of their own accord during the day-time to the shelter of the long wooden cow-house attached to the dwelling. They liked standing in the lake too, and regularly eat all the apples they could find under the trees in the orchards. I short, if Nora could have believed all that the fisherman's daughters told her, as she walked through the wet grass with them to look at their favourite cows, there never had been in this world such excellent, good-tempered, or intelligent animals.

"But here's the best fellow of all!" cried Ursi, stalking up to a great bull that stood ruminating at the cowhouse door, and throwing one arm over his neck with the other she drew his great head towards her,

"I brought him up myself and never let him be vexed, and now he follows me as steadily as the old bell cow herself!"

Nora began to retire towards the house, not a little alarmed at the vicinity of the great animal, that even, while caressing and being caressed, could look so terrible.

The younger sister laughed. "Don't be fearful, miss," she said, encouragingly, "as long as Ursi has a bit of salt in her pocket he will not come near us!"

"You are afraid of him too," said Nora.

"Oh no — he never minds me, and lets Hansl beat him with a stick when he is sent to drive him out of the potatoe field or the oats."

Ursi, who was a stalwart young woman, with a waist and shoulders greatly resembling those of a man, seemed highly amused at Nora's avoidance of her favourite. In order to prove the truth of her last assertion concerning him, she moved on, and was, as she expected, followed by the bull, rubbing his head and shoulder against hers in a manner that would have thrown to the ground any less vigorous personage.

Nora retreated by stepping backwards, and stumbled against Torp, who had come to tell her that her guide, Michael, had arrived, and was waiting for orders.

"Oh that's right," said Nora, "he can bring us some clothes — or at least take a message to Almenau. But how did he find out where we were?"

"He at first thought we had returned to the alp," answered Torp, "and as he had the remnants of our provisions thought it necessary to go there. On his return the waterfall was dashing over the path, and then it occurred to him that — in short he guessed

what had happened, and was confirmed in the idea when he observed the removal of some large stones that I had displaced in springing on the sand; he followed us, arrived here late at night, made his way into the hay-loft, and is now at your service."

"I suppose we had better write," began Nora.

"Let us consider," he said, following her into the house, "let us first consider whether or not it be worth while. The pathway to the village is, you know, under water. If Michael have to go round through Tyrol he cannot reach Almenau until late in the evening: it will not be early to-morrow when your clothes reach you, and you may find it necessary to remain here another day. Perhaps you have no objection to do so?"

"No objection?" cried Nora, interrupting him; "every possible objection! I cannot — will not — remain here if it can be avoided. It is of the greatest importance that I should see the forester and his son without delay — I must also endeavour to prevent the Crag peasant from taking any hasty step; you know he might refuse to resign — he might even disinherit —," she stopped suddenly, remembering that Torp could not understand her, and that he was the last person to whom she could explain her anxieties. "What do *you* mean to do?" she asked abruptly.

"I shall return to Almenau to-day."

"In that dress?" she asked.

"I suppose so," he answered, looking down at his bare knees with a slight grimace.

"If it were not a holiday," said Nora, musingly, "and if we had not to pass through part of Tyrol — but after all there are only a couple of villages before we

get into the Bavarian Highlands again, and I *must* see the forester and Franz before I sleep this night."

Torp, who feared he had shown too much interest in her decision, now thought it necessary to appear supremely indifferent. "Had I my fishing-tackle," he said, walking to the door and looking out at the lake, "I could have spent a couple of days here pleasantly enough perhaps — without it — I should of course be bored to death."

Nora understood this speech in a way he had not intended. She supposed him unwilling to make arrangements for her return to Almenau, and when he looked round she was gone, and he had soon after the mortification to find that she had engaged the fisherman's son to take her and her guide Michael in a hay-cart to the nearest Tyrolean village, so that if he did not resolve to walk several miles unnecessarily he must request a place in her humble equipage, and receive as a favour what he might have offered to her.

To add to his annoyance he soon perceived that she had resolved to give him no further opportunity of exhibiting either his indifference or unwillingness to a nearer acquaintance; for, while she remained at the fisherman's house she effectually contrived to avoid him; not, however, in the downrightly rude manner to which he had had recourse with her and her family, but by quietly withdrawing altogether from his presence. While he was left in solitary grandeur to breakfast on weak coffee and thick cream in the dwelling-room, Nora sat in the kitchen surrounded by the whole family; and when the fisherman's wife assembled her children to examine their dresses before they set out for church, she did the same by Nora, placing on her head the

smartest little green hat in the house, and loudly declaring she was the prettiest girl she had seen for many a day.

What Nora afterwards said or did so completely to gain the hearts of the fisherman and his family, is not recorded; certain it is that they gave her a bouquet of *Alpenrosen*, too large for both her hands, that the children filled her pockets with apples, and that they were all, without exception, employed in arranging the hay-cart for her reception. The board which was to be her seat was covered with horse-cloths and jackets, over the straw beneath her feet the fisherman's son had spread his cloak, and soon after led from the stable a bay mare, whose foal of the preceding year showed a strong inclination to make the excursion with them. While he took his place in front as coachman, his legs dangling downwards, in closest contact with the tail of his horse, Michael stretched himself on the straw in the back of the cart, beside a tolerably large butt containing fish to be sold to the village innkeeper, and during reiterated exclamations of "Adieu," and "May you reach home in safety," Nora was assisted, or rather lifted, into the vehicle by the fisherman himself.

Just as they were about to drive off, she looked up towards Torp, who was standing on the balcony, imagining himself forgotten, hesitated for a moment, and then frankly proposed his going with them, as it would save him a very long walk.

"If you have a place for me," he answered, "I shall be much obliged, but you need not wait, for I can easily overtake you before you reach the end of the meadows."

The flush of annoyance was still on his cheek when

he joined her at the entrance to the valley, and he long continued to walk beside her in a silent thoughtful sort of way, taking no sort of apparent interest in her conversation with the fisherman's son, and her guide of the previous day.

The road resembled the dried bed of a rivulet, being chiefly composed of the stones and sand left on it by the river after various inundations. On one side of them the swollen waters now rushed on, struggling with the impeding stones; on the other the mountain rose abruptly, at times wooded, but not unfrequently exhibiting a succession of bare wild rocks, or a mixture of both, and seldom leaving more space than was absolutely necessary for the passage of the cart.

"If the road continue much longer like this," observed Nora, "I think we might just as well have walked."

"Oh, we shall get into the wood presently," said the fisherman's son, "and once on the road there you shall see how Lizzie can step out."

And soon after they began gradually to ascend a long hill, or rather mountain, on a very rough narrow road. A steep descent followed, where Lizzie in fact stepped out in a manner that made it impossible for Nora to keep her seat without clinging to Torp's arm. She did so unconsciously at first, and he was more pleased than he chose to acknowledge to himself, or wished her to perceive; but he immediately afterwards laid aside his haughty manner as if it had been a garment, and when Lizzie became skittish, and made occasional clumsy attempts at a kick or shied at a felled tree, he laughed heartily, and held Nora's arm faster than ever. What perhaps most amused them both were

the frequent expostulations of their driver with his bay mare; the idea of touching her with a whip never seemed to enter his mind, though he had one in his hand, with he continually cracked, and flourished in the air, in a remarkably carter-like manner, the surrounding mountain echoing quickly and distinctly the loud sharp sounds.

"Go on, Lizzie," he said, in a coaxing manner, as she distrustfully eyed the upturned root of a prostrate beech tree, bearing a grotesque resemblance to a stooping human figure. "Go on, now, and don't be foolish before the strangers, after my praising you, and saying you could do everthing but speak! It's a shame to see you cocking your ears after that fashion, for an old stump that you've passed by every week last winter, when we brought out the charcoal from the clearings to the iron works. Oh, if you want to look at it, and sniff it, I'm sure I've no objection," he said, jumping down and leading her forward, while caressingly stroking her nose; "but," he added, "but instead of the lappet of red cloth for your collar that I promised you at the next fair, it's a pair of goggles, or a lorry to stick in your eye like the town folks, that you shall have, you shy old fool. She's as steady as an ox," he said, half apologetically, while resuming his seat, "as steady as an ox when we're sledging charcoal in winter!"

Notwithstanding various trifling delays of this kind, and longer ones where the road had been injured by the rain of the preceding day, Torp thought they reached the Tyrolean village in an astonishingly short time. As they drove up to the inn door, the landlady came bustling forward, and nodded a familiar greeting, but judging too hastily from appearances, shewed infinitely

more interest about the fish that she expected, than the arrival of guests of so little apparent importance.

Torp and Nora were therefore for some time left to their own devices, and after having looked into the peasant-room, which was crowded to excess, and where a civil but vain effort was made to find a place for them, they naturally went into the other reserved for persons of higher rank, and found in it a numerous assembly of well-dressed people and some travellers, who all turned round and seemed not a little surprised at their intention to join them.

"Perhaps there is a garden where we could dine alone," suggested Nora.

"There is," answered Torp. "I remember being here a couple of years ago with Waldemar."

"Then let us go to the kitchen and inquire about it and our dinner at the same time," said Nora.

And they moved away unconscious of the curiosity caused by the few words they had spoken in their native language.

It was long afterwards that Nora first became fully conscious of the comical position in which she was placed with Torp that day as they stood together by the hearth consulting with the cook about their dinner. Their similarity of taste and unanimity was remarkable, and a very simple repast had been ordered, when the landlady suddenly appeared, and proposed a few additions that convinced them both she had had some conversation with Michael and the fisherman's son concerning them.

In the garden they were not so much alone as Nora had expected. The house was famous for its dinners, and a long wooden arcade and capacious summer-house

were furnished with tables and guests. For Torp and Nora, however, a place was quickly arranged, and so complete was their peasant costume, that they might have escaped notice, had not the landlady chosen to serve them herself, and afterwards waited for an invitation from Nora to take a seat beside them.

"I think," she observed, turning to Torp, "I think you're the foreign gentleman who was here the year before last with the Count?"

"I was in this neighbourhood about two years ago," he answered, evasively.

"He was here last week," she continued, "and a large party of ladies and gentlemen from Herrenburg. There's to be a wedding in the family soon — perhaps two — if we may believe what the servants say."

Torp did not answer; but the landlady could not believe him as indifferent as he looked.

"They say," she continued, "the Count can have the lady from Vienna for the asking — that she's come on purpose — and the old Count is uncommon well satisfied with the match."

"Ah, indeed!" said Torp, carelessly, while Nora, strongly suspecting this lady from Vienna to be her friend Irene Schaumberg, would gladly have asked a question or two had he been absent.

"They have announced their intention of coming here to-day, and honouring our theatre with a visit," said the landlady.

"At what hour?" asked Torp, quickly.

"At two o'clock. And if you and the young lady would not disdain our village performance, you might as well remain for an hour or so to see it."

"I think," said Torp, turning to Nora, "I think the delay would scarcely be desirable for either of us."

"The play is much admired," interposed the landlady; "and the Count said he would go any distance to see our smith act the villain and the workwoman do the duchess."

Nora smiled. She had no doubt that Waldemar had so spoken, but also no inclination to be seen by him and his friends, wandering about so adventurously in the guise of a peasant; so she became as anxious as Torp to avoid a meeting, and joined him in requesting the landlady to send an express to the nearest town for post-horses.

When she had left them for this purpose, Torp informed Nora that the inn-keeper and his wife had found it a good speculation to build a theatre; and he pointed, while speaking, towards a tolerably large wooden edifice at the end of the garden, adding, "Their house is crowded before and after the performances in a manner that amply indemnifies them for the outlay of capital."

"Under any other circumstances," observed Nora, "and in any other dress, I should have liked to remain here a few hours longer, in order to see this drama, or melodrama, in which the smith and workwoman have so distinguished themselves."

"I dare say we should have found it amusing enough," said Torp; "though, why these peasants always choose dramas in which they have to represent princes and dukes and knights in armour, I have never been able to make out."

"Consider these dramas as a criterion of peasant civilisation," said Nora, "and you will no longer wonder at their taste."

"I do not understand you," said Torp.

"Do we not in infancy like tales of giants and ogres and fairies?" said Nora. "Learning to read and exercise our reason brings us further on — to the Arabian Nights, or legends holy and profane. A smattering of knowledge; a very little history, takes us to the crusades, with all their array of kings, queens, princes, knights, and tournaments. This is the longest and brightest period, the manners, the dress, the glory of personal strength, courage, and honesty, the very superstition of that age...."

"Ah, I see," cried Torp, interrupting her, "you consider the peasants in the mountains here to have attained somewhat about the degree of culture that we possess in our tenth or twelfth year."

"I cannot otherwise account for their theatrical taste," answered Nora. "At all events that they can enjoy such dramas is no small proof of peasant cultivation; that they are able to act them, and wonderfully well too, is a still greater. Now I should like to know," she added, leaning her arms on the table and looking at him gravely, "I should like to know if our peasantry in England, Ireland, or Scotland could do as much?"

"I am decidedly inclined to doubt their histrionic talents," said Torp.

"Can you then tell me," she continued in the same tone, "what *are* the amusements or recreations of the lower orders in England, especially in the villages?"

"Really Miss Nixon," said Torp, half laughing, "one might suppose you a foreigner making inquiries about the habits and customs of the inhabitants of the British Islands! It would be preposterous my offering information to a person of your intellect and information, and

your question can only be put to extort the answer that our peasantry have no recreations of this description, and that I scarcely know whether or not they would be capable of enjoying them if they had."

"Excuse my ignorance," said Nora, quietly; "I have, in fact, had no opportunity of judging for myself, for London has been England to me."

"Ah, I had forgotten that," said Torp, "or rather I have latterly found it impossible to suppose an English and especially a London education, could have made you what you are."

He paused, perhaps expecting her to ask what he meant, but as she remained silent he added of his own accord, "You give me the idea of a person who was in the habit of spending more than half the year abroad, and the rest of it in the wildest parts of the Highlands of Scotland."

Nora could not help smiling at a remark that proved she had been much more observed than she had supposed. "I have never been in Scotland, nor even in any of the country parts of England," she observed, after a moment's consideration. "The trees and grass of a dingy square have for many years represented woods and meadows to me, and solely through the medium of their sooty blighted vegetation, have I been made aware of the gradual change of season going on beyond the houses of our overgrown metropolis."

"And yet," said Torp, "I am convinced you like these dingy squares, think London the most delightful place in the world, and make it a standard for all others."

"No, oh no!" said Nora, shaking her head.

"You surprise me," he rejoined, somewhat cavalierly,

"for most London people consider their town *par excellence* a perfect paradise!"

Not a little amused at finding herself civilly called a cockney, yet unwilling to enter into any explanation, Nora watched in silence and with some interest the effect which the supposition and recollections of her family would produce on her companion. He had been building a pyramid of small, bright, yellow-coloured apricots, and continued his occupation in an absent manner until a little boy placed a play-bill in Nora's hand, which she instantly began to study. Then Torp looked up, leaned slightly across the narrow table in order to read with her, and as she placed the paper between them and they bent over it together, cockneys, Nixons, London, and England, seemed altogether to fade from his mind, and he became what she had learned to consider his better self again.

"I am much mistaken," he observed, with a laugh, "if that be not the very thing I saw in Brixleg a couple of years ago."

"And what sort of a 'thing' is it?" asked Nora.

"Why, let me see — it was melodramatic — the duchess, I remember, sang very tolerably, and wore a red gown trimmed with a wonderful imitation of ermine — a yellowish cotton stuff with black spots."

"And the subject of the drama?" asked Nora.

"I am afraid I bestowed too much attention on the people with me, the audience in general, the theatre itself, and the persons of the peasant actors, to have any clear recollection of the drama. I remember there were a couple of large leather dolls, representing children, which were most inhumanly used, though whether they were to be killed outright or exposed in a wood to be

found by a kind-hearted charcoal-burner, or brought up by a compassionate doe —”

“You are getting into the legend of Genoveva,” said Nora, interrupting him.

“Ah, very true — there was a sort of resemblance I believe — at least, the duchess in the red gown was very unhappy about these children, or something else. I think, too, she was turned out of doors by her lord and master, a fellow with a long feather in his hat. The villain of the play was decidedly the best actor, with a few pieces of rather incongruous armour, a plumed helmet and buskins. He ‘strutted and fretted his hour upon the stage,’ to every one’s satisfaction; but whether in his character of robber-knight he only carried off the children, or actually attempted to murder them, — whether he merely provoked the jealousy of the marvellously-dignified duke, or went the length of endeavouring to assassinate him in a lonely wood, I have not the slightest idea. That he had been foiled in all his atrocious attempts was made pleasantly evident by the appearance of the dolls duchess and duke in the last scene, while the villain himself, wounded and in a half recumbent posture, confessed all his sins and misdemeanours in deep, broken, and sepulchral accents!”

“I think,” said Nora, “that after so evident a proof of flagrant inattention to the drama itself, I may reasonably expect that your observations of other matters will prove unusually accurate.”

“I grant without hesitation,” answered Torp, “that the fact of such theatres and performances being popular in the Bavarian Highlands and Tyrol interested me infinitely more than the actual representation going on in

my presence, and that I made inquiries on the subject of every one likely to give me any information."

"And the result?" asked Nora.

"I found that from time out of mind, these plays had been acted by the peasants about here. The original taste for them, and the habit of acting, seems to have been acquired from moralities and mysteries such as we saw at Ammergau; as in some plays a sort of explanatory *tableau vivant* still precedes each act, and a genius, holding a long-stalked lily, walks up and down before the foot-lights to expound its purport. There is a decided predilection for tragedy or serious drama, and all attempts have failed to procure popularity for modern plays or modern dresses; equally evident is the strong prejudice against prose compositions, and the more stilted the style and metre the more certain of applause."

"That I consider a matter of course," observed Nora, "when one takes into consideration that actors and audience are peasants with glowing fancies and partial educations."

"Yet the spirit of improvement or change is at work even here," said Torp, "and during the last few years some innovations have been attempted that are likely to cause an alteration in these performances calculated to make them, if not to the peasants, to us, at least, far less interesting. Formerly the actors were, as at Ammergau, altogether composed of the inhabitants of the village and the neighbouring peasants, who, not having much time at their disposal, only studied a couple of dramas each year, performing them with persevering regularity, on alternate holidays, at the end of the season dividing as shareholders any profits that remained, and generally appropriating the amount to pay the expenses

of a fête in which actors and audience mutually participated. Latterly there have been found enterprising men who have undertaken the management, supplied the dresses, paid the actors according to their capabilities, and not unfrequently tempted performers from the neighbouring towns to appear on their stages.

"I have not the slightest wish to see anything of *that* kind," said Nora, once more taking up the play bill.

"They are, I believe, still quite primitive here," continued Torp; "and even at Brixleg, there were no actors or actresses from Innsbruck or the intervening towns. If, however, the stage is to be a sort of moral institution, a means of instructing the people, as has been so continually advocated in Germany, — better actors and more variety in the choice of dramas might be perhaps desirable."

"I cannot think so," said Nora; "an amateur theatre interests more or less the whole parish, brings the people together for a common purpose, induces them to read and discuss what will suit them best, and is certainly a means of improving their manners. If, as you have given me to understand, you have carefully watched the conduct and appearance of a peasant audience in a peasant theatre, you must agree with me, and wish that our lower orders had similar tastes and similar amusements,"

"It would never answer in England," said Torp. "Even supposing one half of our population found pleasure in theatres of this kind, the other would consider them a cause of umbrage, and regard them with indignation."

"What! even if they were moral or religious dramas?"

"About them there might be the greatest unanimity," replied Torp; "they would, most undoubtedly, be condemned at once as irreverent, if not impious."

"You are thinking of representations such as we saw at Ammergau," said Nora; "and I confess that, notwithstanding the intense interest and admiration I felt for *that* as an exceptional performance, had I the power I should forbid it, and all others in which our Saviour's personal appearance might be supposed necessary."

"I am glad to hear you say so," observed Torp.

"But," continued Nora, "the drama at Ammergau has convinced me that religious subjects are eminently adapted for such theatres, such actors, and such audiences."

"Nothing of the kind would ever be tolerated in England," rejoined Torp.

"And why?"

"We are a religious people," he answered, "and consider the Bible so sacred that no person mentioned in it can with propriety be made to appear upon a stage."

"Is that your opinion also?" asked Nora.

"Not exactly," he replied; "but circumstances have obliged me to live almost constantly abroad, and chiefly in Germany, during the last ten years, so that many of my English prejudices have been modified or relinquished altogether, and I heartily wish that our lower orders had rational amusements of some kind or other to keep them out of the ale-houses and gin-shops."

"I believe," said Nora, "Mr. Hume said something to that purport in the House of Commons once upon a time; but when one reads in statistical reports of hundreds of thousands who never enter a church in this religious country of ours, and more than as many who

cannot read or write, one cannot help asking what amusements would be likely to suit such a people."

Torp shrugged his shoulders, drummed on the table, and then said, "I believe amusements could be found for them as well as for others, but not such as you, in your admiration of the peasantry here, would propose for them."

"You have guessed my thoughts," observed Nora, smiling. "I confess that I was planning gardens where they could hear good music, and drink beer and coffee with their wives. I should like to hear them sing merrily in chorus, and see them dance."

"We are not born singers and dancers, like the people here," said Torp. "You would have to teach us to be happy, Miss Nixon."

"I understand you," she replied. "You think it would be difficult to persuade English peasants that a waltz in the evening was a recreation after a hard day's work."

Torp nodded his head.

"And yet it is considered such here," she continued. "Those people who danced so gaily the other night at our inn had been up and at work before dawn, assembled in their church at six o'clock, and, with but a short rest about noon, had laboured incessantly the whole day! I was astonished to see them equal to such exertion after so much hard labour."

"So was I," said Torp. "They seem a robust race about Almenau, enjoy dancing to excess, and are as ready for a fight as if they had been born Irishmen."

"I cannot deny that," replied Nora. "Our landlady told me that some excesses which had taken place in the neighbourhood had caused the church festivals to be

celebrated on the same day throughout Bavaria, in order to prevent a too great concourse of people in any one parish; and there is also some difficulty in obtaining permission from the land-judge to dance, excepting on occasions such as weddings, or shooting-matches, when the company are invited, and there is no likelihood of a brawl."

"These are the expedient restrictions of a patriarchal government," observed Torp; "but I need scarcely remind you, that our constitution allows no interference of this kind, even for a good purpose."

The landlady announced the arrival of the horses from the neighbouring town, and they both started up, equally anxious to accomplish their departure before the arrival of Waldemar and his friends. Neither made the slightest objection to the high old-fashioned yellow calash and long-legged half-harnessed horses that awaited them. Michael seated himself beside the grey and red liveried Tyrolean postilion, and they set off at a rate that promised a speedy return to Almenau.

At a short distance beyond the village they met a number of carriages containing ladies with gay bonnets and fluttering ribbons, and gentlemen in summer coats, and green or grey felt hats of fantastic forms. The carriages passed in quick succession, and evidently belonged to the same party: for, as the gentlemen in the first stood up to look after Torp and Nora, whom they supposed to be rich peasants taking their pleasure in a post-chaise, the others followed their example; and a gentleman in the last carriage, throwing the reins to the servant beside him, sprang to the ground and shouted "Halt" to their postilion in a voice that was not to be disobeyed.

Neither Torp nor Nora were surprised to see Waldemar, though his amazement at the meeting was boundless. While Nora explained, he murmured at intervals, "What an adventure! Why was I not with you? Oh, that I had been in Torp's place! — delightful — romantic" — and as she bent down towards him, and in a low voice mentioned her uneasiness about long Seppel from the Crag — should the forester's son prove implacable, and denounce him to the judge, he instantly offered to return to Almenau for a couple of days to defend him as far as lay in his power, and to use all his influence to set matters to rights again.

"Thank you — oh, thank you," cried Nora, extending her hand to him with the warmth and unreserve that so surprises and delights foreigners on the part of Englishwomen, especially when they happen to be young and handsome. "Be sure you don't forget," she added, glancing at the carriage that still waited for him in the distance; "for I am more interested in this affair than you can imagine, or I will venture to tell you."

"If I am to act as counsel," said Waldemar, archly, "you must give me your whole confidence."

"Is it not enough to say that this Seppel is, or rather was, to be married to the forester's daughter?"

"Oh, it's the love affair that interests you," he rejoined laughing; "in that case you may venture to tell me all about it, and be quite sure of my sympathy. But there seems to be something else, too," he added, as the thought of how far her cousin John was implicated, made her colour deepen in a very perceptible manner. His eyes sparkled, a sudden flush passed across his features; but, without waiting for an answer, he raised his hat, drew back, nodded laughingly to Torp; and,

while they drove off, stood looking after them as long as they remained in sight.

CHAPTER IX.

The "Big Sausage."

ALL that Nora most feared had taken place. Rosel had been unable to keep pace with her brother, who, pressing forward, had reached home long before her, and required but a few words to inspire his father with a fury equal to his own. Together they had gone to the judge, Seppel had been summoned for examination, and the presumptive evidence against him found so strong, when corroborated by his own account of himself, that he had been taken at once into custody.

The Crag peasant, affecting even more indignation than he really felt, had openly condemned his son, declaring "he had never expected anything else from so lawless a fellow, who, he was convinced, had only been playing steady and well-behaved in order to get possession of house and land! but he might now go back to his regiment and the officers who thought so much of him — it was the best thing he could do, for not a rood of ground at the Crag should ever belong to him!" To end all discussions and disputes with his wife and neighbours on the subject, the old man had carried his threat into immediate execution by taking the steps necessary to put his younger son into immediate possession of the property.

Discord seemed to have changed the character of every member of the forester's family. The cheerful Rosel hung her head in deepest despondency, and, with

eyes half closed by their swelled lids, listlessly and mechanically followed her mother's restless movements from place to place. The usual serenity of the latter had been completely disturbed by what she called the imprudent conduct of her "man" and "boy" in breaking off the marriage of Rosel, and giving up the thousand florins so generously offered by the young English lady! And for such a trifling offence too! for she could not be brought to consider imprisoning in an Alpine hut in any other light, waxing in wrath as the others explained and expostulated, and ending by calling her son a blockhead, notwithstanding his forester learning, and her husband a fool, who would live to repent having destroyed the prospects of one child to humour the anger of another! Franz had snatched up his rifle and retreated to the wood, and the forester, after growling some unintelligible words intending to convey the idea that he was master of his house and children, and that no wildschütz should ever darken his door, sneaked off to his workmen at the river, while his wife expended the remainder of her roused energy on her floors and furniture, scouring, rubbing, and dusting in a manner that had effectually prevented either of the offenders from again making their appearance during the day.

The work of cleanliness had been completed, but there were still damp boards and a strong smell of the fir tree besoms and wisps so universally used in the Highlands for the purpose of sweeping and scouring, when Nora stopped at the forest house to change her dress before she appeared at the inn or the village. A sort of reserve had gradually crept over her and her companion as they had approached Almenau, and it was to Michael that she turned when alighting, with the

request that he would tell Mr. Nixon that she was quite safe, and would be with him in half an hour.

"The young English gentleman is gone to the Wild Alp with some men from the village," said the forester's wife as Torp drove off; "they hoped to be able to cross the waterfall this afternoon, and never doubted your having remained in the Alp hut during the night."

While hastily relating her mountain adventure, Nora proceeded to her room, followed by Rosel and her mother. The latter immediately began a minute account of all that had occurred during the last two days, ending with bitter complaints of both husband and son, who had thought of nothing but satisfying their own revengeful feelings.

"Let us hope that Seppel's identity cannot be proved," observed Nora, consolingly. "They say his face was blackened with charcoal, and there was scarcely any light in the hut. Under such circumstances your son cannot venture to assert positively that his assailant was Seppel!"

"But the foolish fellow has confessed —" began the forester's wife.

"Nothing — mother — nothing," cried Rosel, "he only said that he had slept for a few hours in one of the huts on the Alp, and heard the report of a gun or rifle somewhere on the mountain."

"I'm afraid that is enough, and more than enough, to confirm every one's suspicions," said her mother; "besides, Franz heard the others call him by his name."

"We have no less than nine Seppels in our village," rejoined Rosel, eagerly, "and the name is quite as common at the other side of the mountains. If they had said Kraft or Craggs —"

"Kraft he may still be called," said her mother,

interrupting her, "but Craggs never. Before a week is over Anderl will be in possession of all that was to have been yours, and there is no use in talking more about the matter."

"If they cannot prove him guilty —" began Rosel.

"All the same," said her mother, despondingly; "You know the old man only wants an excuse to do as he pleases."

"Count Waldemar is coming here to-morrow," observed Nora, "and has promised to do all he can for Seppel."

"The Count has ever been a friend to us, and may go bail for Seppel, and the judge may set him at liberty, but what's the use? Anderl will get the Craggs, and Seppel, at the very most, five or six hundred florins from his father, and with that he cannot marry Rosel!"

"How much would be necessary to enable him to do so?" asked Nora.

"I don't know," answered the forester's wife, unconscious of the kind intention that prompted the question. "I don't know, and it is of little importance, for Rosel will never be allowed to marry a wildschütz. I thought we were going to have two weddings in our family," she added, her voice trembling perceptibly, "but as misfortunes never come singly I was hardly surprised when the miller's daughter told me to-day that all was at an end between her and Franz, as her father had promised her six years ago to black Seppel, who had it in writing, and signed by the miller himself; and that one might as well try to move a mountain as the Tyrolean, when he took anything into his head."

"I have heard something of this," said Nora; "but Madeleine has resolved not to marry this Seppel, and has told him so."

"It is hard to say what she may do," answered the forester's wife; "he's far richer than our Franz may ever be, and that may make her forget that he's a gloomy churlish fellow, and has blood on his hands, as you may have heard from the people here."

"Michael mentioned his having shot his brother by accident," said Nora; "that for this reason he had left home, and made a vow never to touch a rifle again. I think a man in such a position more to be pitied than blamed."

"That's as may be," said the forester's wife, nodding her head sagaciously. "Now, if Crag Seppel were to shoot his brother Anderl by accident, what would you say?"

"That he was a most unfortunate man," answered Nora, perfectly understanding the drift of her question.

"Well, others would judge the deed less charitably, and it would be many a year before old Crag would forgive him."

"Oh, mother, mother! how can you talk in this way!" exclaimed Rosel, wringing her hands.

"I mean no disparagement to Seppel, child; he'll never do, or even think of, anything of the kind; but as to saying that he was not with the Tyroleans on the Wild Alp the day before yesterday, that is out of my power. You know he's a wildschütz, Rosel, and nothing would ever restrain him, excepting, perhaps, a marriage with you, and the chance of an occasional hunt with your father or brother. You see even Miss Nora, who likes him for your sake, thinks —"

Nora, who was about to leave the room, stopped suddenly on hearing a violent burst of grief from Rosel. She turned back, put her hand on the arm of the

weeping girl, and said, kindly, "If they cannot prove him guilty, Rosel, we are bound to believe what he himself says."

"I believe him now — on his word," cried Rosel.

"Of course you do," said Nora, smiling; "it would be very odd if you did not."

Nora, deprived of her round hat, was obliged to put on a gay little Paris bonnet to walk to the inn. Torp was looking out of his window as she entered, and seemed to have a peculiar pleasure in counting the voluminous flounces of her lilac muslin dress, and the various falls of lace and knots of fluttering ribbons that waved round her now well-gloved hands.

"I am glad she has doffed her mountain toggery before Waldemar's arrival," thought the considerate friend; "it would have been all over with him had he seen her for any length of time in that peasant dress. What a precious fool *he* would have made of himself had he been in my place during the last two days!"

Nora found that neither her uncle nor Georgina required any explanation of her prolonged absence. They had heard from Adam that there were villages at the base, farmhouses on the sides of the mountains, a picturesque lake and charming chalet on the Alp itself where mademoiselle could perfectly well pass the night. Jack's uneasiness about her had been incomprehensible to them; and as he had entered into no explanation, and even confirmed Adam's account, they supposed he had only wanted an excuse to leave them and Almenau for a few days again. More at length, and with greater interest, they spoke of Captain Falkner, who had gone to his family to urge their return to Saint Benedict's.

"They may be expected about the end of next week,"

said Georgina; "and in the meantime every thing and person about the place is at our service. Papa was out fishing all day with the gardener, and I spent the afternoon in the drawing-room, where there is an excellent grand piano-forte of Mademoiselle de Falkner's. There are astonishingly few books in the house, and not one, as you know, in the beautiful library at the lake side, — but we shall change all that. Papa has planned a new approach, and thinks we shall have to build something, or make a plantation, to shut out that straggling hamlet that is so close to the monastery. There are some neighbouring farmhouses, too, which must be thrown down at once, as it would never do to have them visible from the drawing-room windows!"

"The houses of which you speak are not farms," said Nora; "they and the land about them are the property of the peasants living in them, and have been in their families for hundreds of years perhaps. All the peasants about here are proprietors."

"I thought they belonged to the monastery, and that the people would be our tenants," said Georgina.

"They may have been something of the kind in former times," replied Nora; "but the forester, who seems to understand these things, tells me that they have been made free from feudal duties long ago, and from most others in the year 1848."

"Bless me!" cried Mr. Nixon, "one might almost suppose the people here better off than in England! You don't mean to say, however, that if I chose to purchase and give a fair price, I could not have my choice of all the land about here?"

"The forests belong to the State," answered Nora; "and though the peasants can undoubtedly sell their

ground if they please, they seldom do so if not overwhelmed by debts, and compelled by creditors."

"Oh," said Mr. Nixon, "I really was preparing myself to hear that these peasant estates were entailed on the eldest heir male, and so forth."

"Not exactly," said Nora; "for, curiously enough, in some places and in some families it is the youngest son who inherits."

"That is curious," said Mr. Nixon.

"Not more so than that many houses in the village have a right of trade," observed Nora.

"What does that mean?"

"That only a certain number of tradesmen are allowed to establish themselves in a town or village. For instance, one master-mason is considered sufficient for a place such as Almenau. The mason here died a few years ago, leaving a childless widow in possession of a red-balconied house with a mason's right of trade. The widow put an advertisement in the newspaper for a journeyman mason who could undertake the management of the business for her, with something more than a hint that if he gave satisfaction he might become master as well as manager. Several applied for the situation, producing certificates, and offering the most satisfactory recommendations. In the course of a few weeks the widow had made her choice and given Almenau a mason."

"Do you know whether the certificates or her own inclinations were most taken into consideration?" asked Georgina, laughing.

"Probably the certificates," answered Nora; "the peasants are very calculating and prudent in their marriages; friends and relations are consulted. These often

overlook strange disparity of age, and put personal inclination out of the question altogether. In this instance the choice seems to have been rational; the mason is a middle-aged industrious man, who, as the people here say, brought some money into the house, and now carries on the business to every one's satisfaction. I had some conversation with him concerning the expense of rebuilding the castle of Waltenburg, and found him very intelligent."

"Oh, ho!" cried Mr. Nixon; "have you that crotchet in your head still?"

"Yes," said Nora, "the ruin I can easily obtain, but very little land in its immediate vicinity."

"You had better let Sam find out something at home for you, Nora. After all, there's no place like England."

"I leave Georgina to answer you," replied Nora, as they moved towards the dinner-table, where the trout and venison soon turned her uncle's thoughts into another channel.

While Torp the next morning loitered over his solitary breakfast under the lime-trees in the garden of the inn, and deliberated whether he should or should not take advantage of the cloudy sky, to fish in the stream between the forester's house and the road, he perceived Nora (the probability of whose appearance on the balcony overlooking the said stream he had also unconsciously taken into consideration) walking quickly through the village. She had evidently been making purchases in the little shop there, for not only had she replaced the round flat hat lost in the storm on the mountain by one equally huge and hideous, but she also carried in her hand a parcel tied up peasant-like in a coloured cotton

handkerchief, from one of the corners of which there protruded a gay bunch of artificial flowers.

Torp began to pour out a fresh cup of the now cold coffee, and to heap an unnecessary number of lumps of sugar into it, not overseeing, while doing so, a single movement of the approaching figure; and he had no sooner convinced himself that Nora was likely to pass without a glance towards him, or even a perception of his presence, than he rose and advanced to the paling that separated the garden from the road to wish her good morning.

"Good morning," she answered, depositing her parcel on the top of the garden gate, and leaning her arms on it while she added, "I have just heard of an opportunity of sending back the clothes I borrowed, to the fisherman's family."

"And these bright coloured things go with them, I suppose," replied Torp; "the 'real flowers' are, I know, for master Hanserl."

"Rightly guessed," said Nora, "I have got the harmonica too," she continued, diving into the parcel. "Madame Cramer had the kindness to open a new packet fresh from the manufactory for me, that I might have no objection to trying them myself. It is wonderfully good for the price," she added, raising the little instrument to her mouth, and breathing rather than blowing a succession of harmonious chords.

Torp smiled, and as he afterwards held it in his hand for a few seconds, he felt marvellously inclined to raise it to his own lips, and 'blow music,' as Hanserl had said, but he refrained.

"Everything I wanted," continued Nora, "was to be found at our wonderful little shop, excepting the 'great

big sausage.' The half a yard of smoked pork that Hanserl so desired to have, can only be procured at the post town, and I find it impossible to get a messenger in the village, as the cloudy sky has made every man, woman, and child turn out to bring in the corn already reaped, before the commencement of the expected rain. Had I known as much as I do now, between six and seven o'clock this morning, I could have found plenty of people to undertake my commission."

"Among the peasants coming out of church after matins?" said Torp.

"Yes," she answered, "for my frequent visits to the churchyard have made me familiar with the names and residences of most of the families about here. I have now a bowing acquaintance with all, and there are some with whom I am becoming almost intimate."

"I can guess who they are," said Torp; "first of all there is Florian, the painter and wood-carver, then the miller and his handsome daughter, and the old peasant called Craggs, from the name of his property. By-the-by, that custom seems as common here as among the lairds of Scotland."

"Quite so," replied Nora, "the poorest peasant takes the name of his land, and it even devolves as a matter of course on any chance purchaser."

"Making altogether rather a confusion of names," observed Torp, "for most of the men have soubriquets also."

"*They* at least are easily learned and remembered," said Nora.

"I don't know that," he replied, "I have, for instance, had some trouble in getting acquainted with the different Seppels. There is black, or Tyrolean Sepp;

red Sepp, of the saw-mill; Sepp from the Rock-wall; and long Sepp, from the Crag; or target Sepp, or — wildschütz Sepp, for by any of these names he is known."

"Poor fellow!" ejaculated Nora, "I hope you will not be obliged to give evidence against him."

"You need not be uneasy," he answered; "as I have only seen him occasionally in his cuirassier uniform coming out of church, I cannot be expected to know him in wildschütz costume, and my suspicion that he was the leader of the poachers who found it necessary or convenient to imprison me will be no detriment to him. There was a small fellow," he continued after a pause, "who attached me singly, and drew off when the others came on to give me fair play: he indeed made himself known to me in a manner not to be mistaken; but," he added, looking steadily at Nora's half-averted face, "but I have no intention of volunteering evidence of any kind, and the forester's son Franz seems not to have observed the individual of whom I speak."

Nora turned away in silence, and Torp no longer doubted her having gone to the alp to release him.

"He seems to expect me to be grateful for his forbearance," thought Nora, "and is perfectly unconscious that his ill-natured refusal to let Jack have a day or two's sport has been the cause of all that has happened."

"Miss Nixon," said Torp, following her, as she crossed the road, and was about to enter the inn, "if you will allow my servant to undertake your commission to the town, he will be most happy to be employed, and a walk will be good for his health."

So the man himself seemed to have thought, for on

inquiry it was discovered he had gone out, and no one knew in what direction.

That Torp was an indulgent master had not escaped Nora's observation. His servant, who appeared to be a very exclusive personage, of rather studious habits, usually passed his time sauntering about in a contemplative manner with a small book in his hand, and a thicker and larger one in his pocket: this last Monsieur Adam the courier pronounced without hesitation to be a *dictionnaire de poche*, which if true may lead the reader to suppose he had on the present occasion sought some more quiet locality for the pursuit of his linguistic studies.

Torp seemed for a moment disconcerted, but only for a moment; the next he turned to Nora, proposed himself as substitute, and when she hesitated, said with a smile, "I require no orders, Miss Nixon; in a couple of hours you shall have the 'biggest sausage' that can be found in the neighbouring town."

"After all," thought Nora, "there is — perhaps — some good in him."

CHAPTER X.

Alpenrosen.

THE two hours had not elapsed, when Torp strode across the low bridge of planks conducting to the forest-house. Waldemar had arrived during his absence, and was now seated beside Nora on the long bench outside the door, where, with his elbow on his crossed knees, and his chin resting in the palm of his hand, he looked up into her face, so profoundly attentive to what she

was saying, that he was unconscious of the approach of his friend, until he actually stood before him.

Great was then his amusement, when Torp drew the huge sausage from the pocket of his shooting jacket; still greater, when Nora thanked him gravely, and at some length, for having taken such a long warm walk, to give pleasure to a poor little fisher boy! Torp, the while, leaning calmly against the door post, neither disclaiming nor explaining.

Nora afterwards turned to Waldemar, as it appeared, in continuation of their interrupted conversation. "If you could manage to see the judge, and procure Seppel's release to-day," she said, earnestly, "we might perhaps induce the Crag peasant to *defer*, at least, the resignation of his property. You perceive there is no positive evidence against Seppel, and a week or two may still set all to rights, as the forester and Franz seem both rather to repent their hasty denunciation."

"Your wishes are orders to me, Mees Nixone," replied Waldemar, rising; "but let it be clearly understood," he added, with a laughing glance towards Torp, "I am about to take this walk for *you*, and not for the cuirassier and wildschütz Seppel."

"Let us rather say for Rosel," suggested Nora; "for Rosel. whom you have known so long!"

"No, Mees Nixone, I make no pretension to be a paragon man like Torp: I will not be good for nothing."

Nora laughed.

"I mean good — for goodness' sake."

Torp laughed.

"Hang your English," cried Waldemar, bursting into German, "we never thought of speaking it, Torp, until

you joined us. What I intended to say was, that I came here to-day for your sake Miss Nixon, and I am now going to the judge also for your sake, and for yours alone."

"Well, well," cried Nora, impatiently, "for my sake and for Rosel's sake, for every body's sake; and, for goodness' sake, do what you can in this unfortunate business."

The two men walked off together, Waldemar half expecting a renewal of Torp's former remonstrances, and quite prepared to retaliate. Not a little was he therefore surprised, when his companion, after a few minutes' silence, asked him, with apparent interest, what he expected to be able to do for the wildschütz.

"The evidence against him seems merely presumptive," he answered; "and as he is the son of a respectable peasant, and has a capital discharge from the colonel of his regiment, I shall go security for him. The forester and his son will probably drop the prosecution, the old curmudgeon at the Crag will perhaps relent, and we shall dance at Rosel's wedding precisely in the manner projected by Mees Nora."

"Then, in fact, you think him innocent?" observed Torp.

Waldemar's glance was comical, as he answered, "You know more about that matter than I do, Torp, but I am not disposed to ask you any questions. The fact is, I made up my mind before hand, to believe precisely what your fair countrywoman chose to tell me, and have avoided in any way urging her to be more explicit than she thought necessary. She pleaded for Seppel with consummate tact; dwelt on the attachment between him and Rosel from their childhood; the danger of his

worldly prospects being ruined, if his father were given so good an excuse for depriving him of the succession to the Crag; and mentioned her own wish to confide the grave of her cousin in the churchyard here, to the care of this young man, could he be married to Rosel, and established on his father's property, before she and her family leave the village. Now, though I know he was, — and think he may be still, — a wildschütz, the poor fellow wants to get married, and intends, as we all do sooner or later, to reform and grow steady, and I am not the man to refuse to help him out of a scrape, when his cause is advocated in a manner that would move even a stoic, such as you are!"

"I thought," he added, perceiving that Torp stopped in a very determined manner, when they reached the inn, "I thought you intended to accompany me into the town?"

"Once a day is enough for me," answered Torp; "and I must go there to-morrow, it seems, to give evidence against your protégé."

"Can you do so?" asked Waldemar. "Remember a man is not easily recognised when his face is blackened with charcoal."

"You have not much to fear from me," rejoined Torp, "for I am by no means sure that my antagonist was this long Seppel; there are enough tall peasants in the Highlands to make it difficult to identify him, though anywhere else in Bavaria he would be a marked man."

"Oh, ho!" cried Waldemar, laughing, "I perceive you have also been engaged as counsel for the defendant, as they say in England."

"No," answered Torp, "that philanthropical office has

been confided to you alone; and I confess I should be rather puzzled, had I to undertake his defence, for although not *certain*, I have a strong *misgiving* that he was the fellow who joined the Tyroleans in flooring and handcuffing me, and I shall of course be obliged to say so if asked. Fortunately my suspicions will do him no harm."

"They will do him no good," said Waldemar, turning away; "but there is no use in our discussing this subject any longer. If you had consented to go into the town with me," he added, walking on, "I should have told you all about Falkner's love affair with your countrywoman, but I dare say you know all about it already."

"I know nothing more than we suspected before you left Almenau," said Torp, walking after him apparently with some reluctance; "Falkner's sudden departure convinced me that some decisive step had been taken, and I concluded he was accepted, as the young lady still passed her days at St. Benedict's, and whenever I chanced to meet her, was more carefully veiled than ever."

"Rightly guessed," said Waldemar; "and now tell me what the adorable Nora has been doing?"

"Wandering incessantly about the village and on the mountains," he answered; "and evidently entertaining a strong predilection for the society of the schoolmaster, shopkeeper, painter, priest, barefooted children, and peasants in general. It may interest you to know that her especial favourites are decidedly the wildschütz, and the young assistant forester."

"And," said Waldemar, thoughtfully, "it is very kind of her to interest herself so much for them. Few women in her place could or would enter into the joys

and sorrows of people in a rank of life so inferior to their own, and her plans for assisting them are so rational, that I could have listened to her with pleasure for a couple of hours longer, had not you, as usual, interrupted us."

"I did so for the last time," answered Torp. "No *tête-à-tête* of yours with Miss Nixon shall ever again be disturbed by me."

"What does that mean?" asked Waldemar.

"Simply that I suppose you are free from the little entanglement of which you spoke some time ago, and that you intend to marry my unveiled countrywoman when Falkner takes the veiled one."

"The plan is more pleasant than feasible," said Waldemar. "Falkner has been uncommonly lucky on this occasion — he is really in love. The lady has fortune, and, to crown all, his father declares he took a fancy to her himself the very first and only time he ever saw her. I expected that at least his mother and sister would make objections; for you may remember the last evening they were at home, their annoyance at the general's bestowing a few civil words on the strangers when they came to see the monastery, and saying his old-fashioned politeness was perfectly intolerable."

Yes — Torp remembered the circumstance, and felt some qualms of conscience as the thought flashed across his mind, that his slighting manner towards the Nixons might have had undue weight with them.

"Well," continued Waldemar, "Falkner's sister Charlotte is now quite anxious to 'exercise her English' with her future sister-in-law. His mother is sure he has chosen judiciously; so the whole family and all my

people will be here some time next week. The betrothal and marriage will considerably enliven the monastery; and who knows what may turn up for you or me during the festivities!"

"I have a great mind to decamp before they begin," said Torp. "Under such circumstances it will be impossible to avoid a nearer acquaintance with these Nixons."

"Spare yourself all uneasiness on that account, Torp," observed Waldemar, laughing; "for, without meaning to offend you, I must say the antipathy seems quite as great on their side as yours. Stay here, therefore, friend of my youth! and partake moderately, as beseems your wisdom, of such gaieties as St. Benedict's may offer; and, moreover, bestow occasionally on me still, some of the good and worldly admonitions with which I have ever found you so well provided, — for I fear — I greatly fear — I shall stand in need of such before long!"

They had reached the churchyard gate, and Torp ascended the few stone steps to it before he answered:

"My good and worldly admonitions shall be reserved for myself in future, Waldemar; if you can recal any of them when they are likely to be serviceable, so much the better for you, — of a repetition there is not the smallest chance now or ever."

Waldemar laughed and walked on. Torp sauntered into the churchyard, and, before long, found himself standing before Arthur Nixon's grave. The alpine roses (*rhododendron*) that Nora had received at the lake, and so carefully guarded during her drive to Almenau, had been formed into a wreath, and now hung bright and fresh on the black wooden cross. When Torp stooped

to read the name and date that they encircled, he plucked a spray of the deep pink clustering blossoms, and examined it with an intentness seldom bestowed on such objects, excepting by botanists. Why, when he heard the sound of approaching footsteps he stuffed it hastily into his waistcoat pocket, he perhaps asked himself, and found the answer unsatisfactory, for he again drew forth the little hardy branch, and with great waste of energy, stripped it of all its brilliant array of flowers, flung the devastated stem on the ground, and left the churchyard with lips so closely pressed together, that the word "spoon" with difficulty forced a way between them.

He fished as he had intended in the stream close to the forester's house during the afternoon, not once bestowing even a cursory glance on the dwelling itself or its garden; so that when Waldemar, late in the afternoon, rushed up to him and asked where he could find Miss Nixon, Torp answered, with perfect veracity, that he did not know.

"She has not gone out, I hope?"

"I have not the least idea."

"Yet you must have seen her in the garden, or on the balcony, or at a window, had she remained at the forest-house."

"I am by no means sure of that," answered Torp, beginning to pack up his fishing-tackle with all the accuracy of an English angler; "for, without being furnished with eyes at the back of my head, I could not well throw my line at this side of the stream and know what was going on behind me."

Waldemar sprang up the rocks, vaulted over the garden-paling, and finding the harbour unoccupied, ran

into the house. When he reappeared he seemed to have forgotten Torp; for, following the directions of the forester's wife, who accompanied him to the door, he turned into the path conducting to the mill, and was soon lost to sight.

Torp looked after him intently, musingly, then deliberately fastened a fresh fly on his line, and sauntered after his impetuous friend, observing to the forester's wife, who seemed to expect him to speak as he passed her, that "he was going to try for a bite in some of the pools near the mill.

CHAPTER XI.

The Old Char-à-Banc.

A TYROLEAN fruit-seller, who had harnessed himself to a small cart filled with grapes and peaches, brought Nora a note from Jack, written with very pale ink, on remarkably coarse paper, and containing the following lines: —

"DEAREST NORA,

"When I left Almenau to go to your rescue at the Wild Alp, I made the necessary preparations for a pedestrian tour in Tyrol afterwards, but altogether forgot to mention my intention to our governor. I shall be absent about a week or ten days, according to circumstances; I intend, however, to return in time to give Georgy my blessing when the betrothal comes off. So make all straight like a brick, as you are and always have been. In case you should wish to communicate with me by letter or otherwise during the next week, I shall leave a few lines for you at the house of the

sexton of St. Hubert's to let you know where I am to be found. A walk there will be little more than moderate exercise for one of your energetic habits. The man supplies pilgrims with coffee; and if you wish for a glass of Tyrolean wine, his grandson will take you across the frontiers in half-an-hour.

"Ever your affectionate JACK.

"Perhaps it is as well he is absent for a short time," thought Nora, as she walked towards the inn the next morning to make "all straight."

"An ill-timed tour," observed Mr. Nixon, in a tone of vexation. "The Falkner family may return to the abbey to-morrow or the day after — they invite us to dinner as a matter of course — and where is my son John?"

"And, in fact, where is he?" asked Georgina, without turning from the window where she had been a careless listener of Nora's communication.

"Wandering about Tyrol," answered her father; "and not, as I supposed some time ago, with that young artist who has turned out to be a Count somebody."

"Certainly not with him," observed Georgina, "for he is now in the garden with Mr. Torp. And oh! Nora," she continued, "do look at the strange vehicle they have just drawn out of the wooden shed they call a coach-house!"

"In that same strange vehicle," said Nora, "I shall drive into the next town about an hour hence."

"You? for what purpose?"

"To be questioned by the judge of the district about a wildshütz who happened to be on the Wild Alp a few hours before me, the day of the storm."

"A Wildschütz," observed Mr. Nixon, "is aw — I suppose — aw — a sort of Freischütz?"

"No," answered Nora, "they would call him a poacher in England."

"And you are to be questioned about such a fellow — called up as witness before a judge — without my being made acquainted with a single circumstance of the case! This is to say the least a most extraordinary mode of proceeding. In what way was the requisition notified to you?"

"Count Waldemar told me yesterday."

"That is not a legal summons," observed Mr. Nixon, with dignity, "and you have every right to dispute —"

"I believe," said Nora, interrupting him, "there was a man in a uniform with a printed paper at the forester's, and they sent a gend'arme into the wood to find him and his son. Rosel, who was with me on the Alp, has also been summoned, and Mr. Torp too, so we are quite a company of witnesses, and Count Waldemar goes I believe as volunteer."

"I shall go as your uncle — my presence will protect you," said Mr. Nixon.

Now though Nora felt not a little nervous about the coming examination, and greatly feared that a good cross-examination might elicit more than she was disposed to confess, she did not expect that her uncle's presence would in any way lessen her embarrassment. Nevertheless she was glad that he proposed to accompany her, for she thought his appearance might prevent Waldemar from assuming the character of protector, and there had been something in the expression of Torp's face the day before, when he had discovered him sitting with her and

Rosel at the mill, that had made an unpleasant impression on her.

The strange vehicle that had so surprised Georgina was one of those very antiquated char-à-bancs now only to be found in very out-of-the-way villages; their successors, the one-doored omnibus, is so little inviting, even for pic-nic parties or fishing excursions, that the most rattling market-cart of a peasant affording an uninterrupted view of the wondrously romantic scenery is preferable. Youthful recollections may perhaps cause some elderly people to overvalue the advantages possessed by those old-fashioned carriages; it may be urged that the cushions were hard and the springs of primitive construction, we deny it not; but these disadvantages were more than neutralized by the rows of seats facing the horses, each apart and yet together; the open sides, with the long footboards that facilitated a change of place without interrupted movement, the lofty roof, the ease of ingress and egress in mountain districts, when, either to spare the horses or relieve incipient impatience, steep hills are so often climbed on foot, the laughing pedestrians beguiling the ascent by plucking flowers, twisting wreaths round each other's hats, or with bright eyes and glowing cheeks looking back to recover breath and admire the scenery through which they have passed, and over which distance so soon begins to throw her veil of ultramarine blue.

The char-à-banc of Almenau was in a very neglected condition; no attempt had been made for many years to renew its pristine colours, so that the wheels and footboards had hardly a trace of paint left; the lithographs, that, ingeniously transferred to the panels of the seats, had once glowed through the yellow varnish as highly-

prized decorations, were now scratched and partially obliterated; yet the vehicle, strong in its clumsiness, seemed to defy time, and its air of rusticity accorded well with everything in and about the village.

Let us note and sketch this old carriage and the still unsophisticated manners of these Highland peasants. A few years hence an already projected railroad will pass within a couple of miles of the secluded hamlet, and instead of the solitary English fisherman or Munich artist, crowds of tourists may perhaps pour into the secluded valleys, and, attracted alike by the beauty and novelty of the scenes brought within their reach by the all-exploring locomotive, may turn these Bavarian Highlands and Tyrol into a second Switzerland; — hotels and boarding-houses may rise with the dimensions of barracks in all directions; — every pebble on the path, and plant on the mountain side, may have its price; — and the stream that now, as if in recreation, dances lightly over the wheels of the isolated mill, may not long hence have to labour restlessly to turn those of a succession of factories.

"I should think," said Mr. Nixon, looking at his watch, "that our letters and papers must be here by this time. Mr. Torp has received his more than an hour ago."

"His letters do not come with ours," observed Georgina; "they are sent to him by an especial messenger in a sealed parcel from the post-office, and his servant stands waiting for them at the inn door, as if they were political despatches of the utmost importance."

"Ah! I was not aware of that," said Mr. Nixon. "Now, if he were obliging, he would allow his messenger to take charge of our letters also."

"But he is not at all obliging," said Nora, following her uncle and Georgina to the garden.

Waldemar rose, and Torp bowed with unusual urbanity as they entered it, and soon after the latter even pushed the latest newspapers towards Mr. Nixon, when he observed him eying them with a longing look. His spectacles were forthwith adjusted on the end of his nose, his head thrown back, and one of the newspapers held stiffly at that distance which so astonishes all near-sighted people, while he eagerly sought and then read attentively the "fashionable intelligence."

"It seems," he observed, after a pause, raising his eyebrows and looking over his spectacles towards Torp, whom he addressed as the possessor of the paper, "It seems that the Earl of Medway is in Tyrol with some distinguished foreign friends on a sporting excursion. I wonder is he likely to pass through this village before we leave it?"

Georgina turned to her father as if the intelligence were deeply interesting to her. Waldemar's eyes seemed to dance in his head as he asked if they were acquainted with the Medway family.

"Why, aw — we are — and we are not," answered Mr. Nixon; "my daughter, Georgina, met them a good deal in society."

Waldemar turned to her inquiringly.

"I have been introduced to Lady Medway and her daughters," she said, "but they lived too much abroad lately to admit of intimacy. The late Lord Medway I met frequently when he happened to be in England."

"And his brother?" asked Waldemar, eagerly, "his brother?"

"Oh, you mean Charley Thorpe?"

"Yes, yes, I mean Charley; do you know anything of Charley?"

"From hearsay a good deal," replied Georgina, smiling. "He was generally considered the brains carrier of the family — the Solomon and Solon."

"That is — clever?" said Waldemar, touching his forehead significantly.

"People supposed so, though they talked more of his eccentric exploits and Herculean strength than of anything else."

"Ah! he was a boxer — an athlète," said Waldemar, amused.

"We have no objection to that sort of thing in England," rejoined Georgina; "and though ill-natured people said he used exercise and blankets like a jockey, and ate raw beefsteaks to keep himself in condition, he some way managed to make himself of immense importance and very fashionable, and was always an infinitely greater man than his brother Lord Medway."

"What must he be now that he is Lord Madeaway," suggested Waldemar.

"That is precisely what I should like to know," answered Georgina. "There is a sort of relationship between our family and his —"

Torp, who had been leaning on the table, gently rubbing his chin with an air of languid amusement, here interrupted her by calmly repeating the word "relationship."

"I believe I ought rather to have said connexion," continued Georgina, with slightly heightened colour; "but," she added, turning to Nora, "you at least can —"

"No," interposed Nora, quickly. "No, I wish for no

acquaintance, and make no claim to any connexion with the present Lord Medway."

"Perhaps you are right," said Georgina, with some pique; "for from all accounts he is a cold-hearted, calculating man, and it is certain was so resolutely bent on being himself Lord Medway, that he effectually prevented any of the many marriages projected by his brother from taking place."

Waldemar's countenance expressed surprise, but only for a moment, the next he shook his head so incredulously that Georgina thought it necessary to confirm her assertion.

"In this matter I have been too well informed to admit of a doubt," she said decidedly. "The stories of blankets and raw beef, the steeple-chases, shooting-matches, tree-felling, swimming for wagers, and all his other wild exploits may be at least half inventions; but that he considered himself his brother's keeper is certain; and that he made the poor invalid change his place of residence whenever there was a chance of his committing matrimony is a well-known fact."

To this speech Torp had listened apparently unmoved, but a perceptible paleness spread over his features when, after a moment's hesitation, he laid down the paper he had vainly been endeavouring to read, and fixing his eyes steadily on Georgina, said calmly, "Lord Medway is an acquaintance, a friend of mine, and I have reason to know that he never interfered in his brother's matrimonial plans but once, and on that occasion prevented him from — making an egregious fool of himself."

Georgina had not time to answer, for the inn-keeper, leaning over the garden paling, informed them that the

char-à-banc was ready for their reception, — that the forester and his family had arrived, and, if agreeable, the Crag peasant and his son Anderl would take the remaining places.

Mr. Nixon rose with the others, and turned, as usual, to Nora for explanation.

“Oh! — ah! Are we to have more people with us than these two gentlemen? All right, is it? No other carriage in the village — oh very well.”

He assisted her to the seat immediately behind the coachman, who was no other than Boots equipped in his Sunday low-crowned beaver hat and his black velveteen jacket. Mr. Nixon himself required some time to ensconce his bulky person in the remaining space beside her; but by allowing the tails of his coat to pend over the back of the seat, and a few other judicious arrangements, he was at last seated to his own satisfaction, though by no means to that of Waldemar, who, equally surprised and disconcerted at the unexpected addition to their party, took the vacant place beside Torp. The forester and his son, his wife and daughter, the Crag peasant and his son Anderl, occupied the remaining seats, and when the coachman, without a word of explanation, took up the old mountain miller as he trudged slowly along the road in the same direction, a more heterogeneous company could hardly be imagined, or a dozen of people easily found who, by an odd series of circumstances, had possessed and used the power of annoying each other in so determined a manner.

Nora, who had been apprehensive that her uncle might become loquacious and confidential, and in the course of conversation inform their English-speaking companions that she was his niece, which would at once

betray her to Torp, was glad to perceive that the manner of the latter to Georgina had given umbrage, and that her uncle was as reserved as she could possibly have desired.

No one spoke, and all rejoiced as they rattled over the pavement of the town, and stopped at the entrance to the large building occupied by the judge.

In a long, vaulted, and paved hall, formed by a large portion of the ground floor, a couple of gensd'armes were walking up and down, while some peasants, dispersed in groups, arranged their dress previous to making their appearance before the judge or one of his adjuncts. With persevering diligence they rubbed their right arms round the crowns of their hats, or dusted their shoes with pocket-handkerchiefs that rivalled the brightest Indian patterns in brilliancy of colours: their wives and daughters, whose presence had been required, were no less occupied in the setting to rights of their more elaborate toilets. The white kerchiefs were removed from the grenadier-like caps, the gilt helmets, the Munich cap, so strongly resembling a fish-tail both in form and composition, or the black silk kerchief that threatens to supersede all other head-dresses. These last were worn by some tied unbecomingly over the forehead as in Corsica; by others they were lightly wound round the back of the head in the manner of the Neapolitan peasants, or as they may be seen on the frescos at Pompeii; but all were now freshly tied, and the long ends made to float more wildly over the shoulders. The silver neck-chains, too, were drawn into view, and many a refractory stocking readjusted quite *sans gêne* on legs of more than stout proportions.

Scarcely had the char-à-banc party had time to look

round them before they were accosted by the fisherman from the Kerbstein lake and his wife; the latter rushed up to Rosel and her mother, and seizing their hands, began a long tearful condolence, breaking into occasional exclamations by no means calculated to promote the return of peace in the afflicted family. "To think that your own husband and son should bring such sorrow upon you! but the forester was always hot tempered, and Franz is a chip of the old block it seems! A right reputable match it would have been for Rosel, and pleasant for all to have her at the Crag. — Well, I suppose Franz himself having no luck at the mill, didn't choose his sister to have it all her own way. Hard enough — here we came, expecting a pleasure, and a feast, and a betrothal; and a gend'arme marches us up to the judge, and expects us to bear witness against the bridegroom that was to be, — the man who invited us, and is our godson into the bargain! We had our gifts prepared — small indeed, but such as beseems the occasion."

This was too much for Rosel and her mother, they burst into floods of tears. The forester turned to the fisherman, and began an eager explanation and justification of his son's conduct, Mr. Nixon looked perfectly bewildered, Waldemar bored, for Nora appeared to have forgotten his presence, while Torp, standing a little apart, seemed not only suddenly to comprehend, but even in no small degree to sympathise in the feelings of the agitated speakers. His eyes were fixed intently on Nora, as she laid her hand on the old forester's arm, and in a few fervent words hoped that if Seppel should be acquitted by the landjudge, he would also be considered guiltless by him, and once more received into favour at the forest-house.

"I will do what I can, Miss Nora, — anything in reason for your sake," he answered; and then perhaps willing to have so kind a mediatrix between him and his wife, he added, "If Seppel were not a wildschütz, I don't know any one to whom I'd sooner have given my Rosel — but that's all over now and no help for it. Old Craggs has just gone up the stairs with his son Anderl, and before they come down again —"

"I know — I know," said Nora, interrupting him; "the mischief caused by your son's precipitancy in that quarter cannot be repaired, so we shall say no more about it; but promise me to bear no malice towards Seppel, to let Rosel speak to him again, and to give him work as wood-cleaver for a few weeks, in some place where he will not be exposed to temptation."

"I've no objection," said the forester. "Seppel is a good workman, and may go up next Monday to the clearance above the miller's alp — that is — if the accusation against him cannot be proved, or the Count goes security for him, as he has offered to do if it should be necessary."

Just then they all began to mount the stairs together, and were conducted into a large room where a number of young men were seated or standing at writing tables provided with desks, ordinary writing materials, and quantities of sand, which they strewed about their tables and the floor in such profusion that the latter might be said to be sanded.

Many of these gentlemen (for such they all were by education if not by birth) had black linen covers drawn over the sleeves of their coats, and some had pens stuck behind their ears, and turned over the leaves of large books, or counted money in a manner that gave an offi-

cial and business-like air to their proceedings which did not fail to inspire Mr. Nixon with respect. These were the practicans, who, having passed their theoretical law examination, had now to put their acquired knowledge into practice for a couple of years, and afterwards to submit to another examination before they could aspire to even the most insignificant situation under government. Among them there were some who received remuneration for their services from the judge, others were there as volunteers, and to a person aware of such arrangements the difference between them soon became perceptible: while the former bent over their desks scarcely conscious of, and perfectly indifferent to the entrance of strangers, their pens continuing to move rapidly and uninterruptedly along the paper before them, the latter looked up, glanced meaningly at each other, ran their fingers through their hair or twirled their mustachios. Nora's round hat and flounced dress seemed to produce a decided commotion; and when a servant opened the door of an adjoining chamber and said the judge required the services of Baron Waltenburg as protocoller, a young man, the envied possessor of a blonde moustache rivalling in length that of the present king of Sardinia, rose with undisguised alacrity to follow him out of the room, leaving on his table, for the amusement of his companions, the rough draught of a report in some criminal investigation, on the ample margin of which he had sketched with a pen a variety of sylph-like female forms in round hats, with eyes of amazing dimensions not very artistically represented by elongated blots of ink.

The forester, his son, Torp, the fisherman and his wife, had been successively summoned, — then Rosel

with her mother, and at last Nora, who seemed to derive no sort of confidence from her uncle's presence, for she turned immediately to Waldemar with a look of alarm.

"I can introduce you to the judge," he said, in reply to her silent appeal, "but he will not give me permission to remain in the room."

Mr. Nixon, who perceived that their turn was come, prepared himself for his appearance before the judge by twitching up his shirt collars, pulling down his waistcoat, and drawing Nora's arm within his in a dignified manner.

Waldemar accompanied them to the door, looked into the room for a moment, and nodding his head familiarly said, "Fritz, allow me to introduce Mr. and Mees Nixone."

Now Fritz was no other than the judge himself, who rose from his writing-table as they entered and politely offered chairs. He was a middle-aged man, gentleman-like and prepossessing in appearance, wearing a dark blue uniform with crimson facings, on which flashes of lightning were embroidered in gold; and this dress, added to a decided, authoritative manner, seemed so little to belong to a gentleman of the long-robe, according to Mr. Nixon's English notions, that he immediately concluded another, and very unnecessary delay had occurred on his way into "court," and that the military-looking personage before him must be an officer, perhaps in command of the soldiers he had seen in the streets of the town. He therefore accepted the offered chair with a bow and a smile, spread out the tails of his coat, seated himself deliberately, and holding, or rather balancing his hat with both hands between his knees, looked calmly out of the nearest window, and civilly ob-

served, "Long threatening comes at last; we are going to have rain now and no mistake!"

Young Baron Waltenburg, who was seated at an adjacent table arranging some sheets of foolscap, on which much close and even writing might be seen without any marginal sketches, found it necessary to bend down his head and struggle with an untimely fit of laughter. The judge smiled and murmured the word "English," while Nora hastily began an explanation to her uncle.

"Eh — what! — no assizes — no jury! — This gentleman a judge, is he? ah — ah — very well. I suppose, though I know nothing of this affair, I had better tell him who I am and why I came here?" He rose, waved his hat, and began, "My name is Nixon—"

Nora felt greatly inclined to join in the only half-stifled laughter of the young practisant; but the dread of a cross-examination, such as the reports of the London papers had made familiar to her, overcame her disposition to mirth, and she interpreted gravely to her uncle the few words afterwards addressed to him in French by the judge.

"He regrets that he cannot speak English," she said in a low voice, "but on the present occasion it is of the less importance, as he is aware that you cannot be required as a witness by either party."

Mr. Nixon sat down.

When Nora then saw the judge refer to his notes, and the practisant lean forward pen in hand, ready, as she supposed, to write down her words, she became so pale, and looked so frightened, that the former thought it incumbent on him to reassure her. He did so in German, which made her aware that Waldemar had spoken of her to him, and said he should only ask her

a few questions likely to serve as corroboration to the depositions of her companion Rosel, and their guide Michael.

Although he seemed perfectly aware that she had not personally assisted in the release of the Englishman, "Carl Torpe, Count of Medoei," and Franz Hartmann, assistant forester, in consequence of her having lingered behind the others on reaching the alp, yet he made her relate very circumstantially all she had seen after her arrival there. That she had sat for hours alone on the rocks afterwards he also appeared to know; but that, and her subsequent adventures in the storm, he passed over as irrelevant, though he was minute in his inquiries about what she had heard of Seppel at the fisherman's house, so much so, that she was heartily sorry she had asked any questions concerning him on that occasion.

At length there was a pause, and Nora hoped it was all over, when he added, "It was a singular piece of good fortune for the prisoners, your going to the Wild Alp just that day, Mademoiselle: had Rosel Hartmann been the proposer of the excursion, I should have had reason to suspect that she had been sent there by — Seppel himself. She assures me, however, that the proposition came from you. Is this the case?"

"Yes," answered Nora, with an embarrassment that did not escape the questioner.

"It must have been rather a sudden resolution on your part," he continued, "for I understand another excursion had been projected for that day."

This appearing to Nora an observation, and not a question, she attempted no answer.

"I know you are interested for Seppel," he observed,

not a little amused at her reserve, "and I perceive your reluctance to say anything to his disadvantage; nevertheless, I must ask you if, by chance or otherwise, you did not see him the evening before you went to the Wild Alp, and if he did not then request you to release *your* countryman, and *his* future brother-in-law from their unpleasant situation?"

"No," answered Nora, still so embarrassed at what she considered a prevarication on her part, that the judge thought it necessary to ask her when she had last seen Seppel. "I have not seen him," she replied, "since he left the village four days ago, to invite the fisherman at the Kerbstein lake to his betrothal."

"Did he send you any message by one of the peasants in the neighbourhood?"

"N—o."

"Or a hint through the medium of one of the Tyroleans, who so frequently pass through the village?"

"No," again answered with an expression of relief, for she perceived the much-dreaded examination was at an end.

The judge rose, so did Mr. Nixon, and Nora, feeling herself no longer in what her uncle called "court," immediately asked if there were any chance of Seppel's release.

"As you have not seen him, or received any message from him since this unpleasant occurrence took place," said the judge, smiling at her eagerness, "and as Count Waldemar offers to go security for him, I believe I can set him at liberty, provided he remains in the neighbourhood, ready to appear and answer any further charges that may be made against him in the course of time."

"Oh, none will be made, I am sure," said Nora.

"Probably not," rejoined the judge, "I am even inclined to think that he has been unjustly accused on this occasion."

Nora looked down, pained with the consciousness of being better informed than he was.

"Almost all I have heard to-day," continued the judge, "is in his favour. Even the description given by the forester's son of the brutal conduct of his antagonist, which he repeated just now, when no longer under the influence of angry excitement, seems so very unlike that of a man to his future brother-in-law, and so completely in opposition to Seppel's well-known character, that I am inclined to think the whole gang were Tyroleans, and that one of them revenged himself for the unpleasant watchfulness of the forester, on the person of his son. Seppel himself assures me he has not touched a fire-arm since he returned from Munich, and this morning I sent to the Crag for his rifle, and examined it myself." He took it from his gunrack while speaking, and, forgetting that Mr. Nixon could not understand him, turned politely towards him, and began to expatiate upon the proofs that it had not been loaded, or even cleaned, for several months.

Mr. Nixon, who had never loaded a gun in his life, and was even more afraid of "dreadful accidents" than Nora of cross-examinations, drew back, and edged so obviously towards the door, that the judge, concluding he was wearied, merely added, as he turned to Nora, who seemed to wish to hear more, "You alone could have convinced me of his guilt, for had he, by word or message, tried to induce you to go to the alp, it would have been impossible to have doubted that, if not a

principal actor, he had been at least a party concerned in this disagreeable affair."

Nora had heard enough, — she was glad to escape into the adjoining room, though there she encountered the tranquil, scrutinizing gaze of Torp, quite as disagreeable to her now, as it had been some days previously to her cousin Jack, and his wild companions on the alp.

The horses had been taken from the char-à-banc, and while waiting for their re-appearance, Mr. Nixon perceived that the rain he had so facetiously predicted in the judge's apartment, was now falling in torrents, accompanied by cold gusts of wind, that made him greatly rejoice in the warm paletot with which he had not forgotten to provide himself, and in which he now perambulated the hall, casting sidelong, half-triumphant glances at the summer garments of his companions, and stopping occasionally to remind Nora of her folly, in having refused to take a shawl with her. Perhaps it was the constant reiteration of these now useless remarks that made her so determinately avoid his vicinity on her way back to the village; certain it is, that she took possession of the last seat but one, and, beckoning to Rosel to take the vacant place beside her, was soon altogether engrossed by the occupation of consoling the despairing girl, whose worst fears had been confirmed by seeing the Crag peasant and his son Andrew, walking off together to the Golden Lion, while long Seppel, once more at liberty, had been passed by both without the slightest notice, and now stood leaning against the gateway of the judge's house, his eyes fixed wistfully on the char-à-banc, and the people taking their places in it.

"Holloa Sepp," cried Waldemar, "there's room here

beside our coachman for you, and don't look as if you had lost all hope of better days, because your father has cut you off with five hundred florins, instead of resigning his rocky acres to you, burthened with an alimention for himself, that would have made your life a continual struggle with poverty. Cheer up, man, — the forester has promised to forget, and Franz to forgive, and something may turn up for you yet, of which there is at present little prospect."

He glanced back towards Nora while speaking, and received a smile and nod so animated and confidential that Torp felt provoked even to the length of accusing her of bestowing a too flattering degree of familiarity on his friend; yet he soon after forgot his disapprobation in honest appreciation of her forgetfulness of self and indifference to petty discomforts. The oil-cloth curtain, which she had supposed would defend her from wind and rain, happened, just beside the place where she was sitting to be so completely torn, and in such a state of decay, that, after a few fruitless efforts to hold it together, she resigned herself quietly, and without a word of complaint, to the pelting of the pitiless storm, though her glance towards the clouds, and the dripping roof of the char-à-banc, showed plainly that she knew a very few minutes would complete the work of saturation. She moved nearer to Rosel, and began to speak in a low yet cheerful voice, and her words seemed to have a magical effect upon the latter, for her tears ceased to flow: she looked up eagerly, then smiled, seized Nora's hand, and, had not a struggle ensued, would certainly have raised it to her lips. Meanwhile, Torp had found it impossible to allow the muslin-clad shoulders and arms before him to remain unprotected: he leaned forward, with one

hand held the tattered strips of oil-cloth partially together, with the other raised his broad-brimmed grey felt hat from his head, and so placed it and his own person that neither wind nor rain could reach Nora. Without touching, he was very close to her, and heard, or overheard — if we must use the word — what fully accounted for Rosel's ebullition of joy and gratitude, explained Waldemar's glance, and made the expression of Torp's own face soften in a very remarkable manner. No one, however, observed this, for he was sitting in the last seat alone, and Waldemar, the only person who thought of turning round occasionally, was just then giving Mr. Nixon a history of the ruins of Waltenburg, which formed a prominent object in the landscape, and informing him that they belonged to the young practisant he had seen with the judge, and who, not having money to rebuild the castle, would gladly sell the remaining walls of the residence of his ancestors for almost anything he could get for them.

When they reached the village, and drew up before the door of the inn, Torp leaned back, clapped his supersaturated hat on his head, and assumed his usual air of serene impassibility. During the universal bustle attending the descent of the others from the open sides of the char-à-banc Nora turned to him with a smile which he had no inclination to criticize, and said, significantly glancing towards his wet hat and shoulders, "I cannot let you suppose me unconscious of the manner in which you have shielded me from storm and rain during our drive, Mr. Torp; and, though I know you dislike being thanked, I must say I am very much obliged to you."

While half-a-dozen people assisted her to descend

from the char-à-banc at the side next the inn, Torp sprang to the ground at the other, rushed into the house up the stairs and into his room, flung his hat on the table, dragged off his clinging tweed jacket, and then strode up and down the room, gesticulating like a man in the most violent state of exasperation, and muttering words that, from the tone in which they were pronounced, might be supposed strong invectives mingled with threats of vengeance. "Infatuation — doltish infatuation! Absurd — inconsistent — preposterous! No escape in a small place of this kind, where people are literally shoved against each other! This village, this infernal little nest, will be my perdition! I shall leave it to-morrow with Waldemar, who, fortunately, *must* return to Herrenburg. Ah! there she is again."

He darted to the window, and perceived Nora looking up from beneath a red cotton umbrella, held over her by Waldemar. She was apparently answering some question addressed to her by Georgina from one of the windows of the inn.

"I must put on another dress," she said, gaily, "muslin is too cold for weather such as this."

And as she walked off with Waldemar at one side and long Seppel at the other a sudden change seemed to come over Torp; he looked after them, nodded his head two or three times in ironical approbation, and then soliloquised: "Why not? A man is a fool who avoids the society of an interesting and agreeable woman because he cannot or will not marry her. I did not understand what she was about until to-day, but it is now quite evident that, being employed by her father as deputy in the arrangements concerning his nephew's grave, she is bent on doing a benevolent action at the

same time. Of course the old man has received *carte blanche* from Arthur Nixon's widow, or she could not have made the promise to the forester's daughter that I overheard to-day. Had I known all this sooner I might have spared myself some anxiety about Waldemar, and — made — myself — perhaps — a little less — disagreeable to her."

CHAPTER XII.

Pastime for a Rainy Day.

"THE best friends must part, Torp," said Waldemar the next morning, as he prepared to leave the village in a peasant's cabriolet, apparently but ill calculated to defend him from rain that poured down in a stream directed by the storm. "I hoped to have returned on foot," he added, "and expected to have had your company at least as far as St. Hubert's. By-the-by you can meet me there as soon as the weather clears up, as I intend to take a sketch of the curious old altars in the chapel. Oh! I was on the point of forgetting to mention that I told that adorable Mees Nora to whom you have taken so unaccountable an aversion —"

"By no means," cried Torp, hastily, "my dislike is rather to the family, and especially to the one who caused dissension between my brother and me, but — a — I have no hesitation in saying that to this Miss Nixon I have no particular aversion."

"So much the better," said Waldemar, carelessly, "for I told her, in case she wanted advice or assistance during my absence, to apply to you."

"Advice and assistance?" repeated Torp, inquiringly.

"Why yes — her own people cannot speak German,

you know, and she intends to establish Rosel somewhere about here and make her guardian of her cousin's grave. I enter warmly into her plan, but do not see any way of putting it into execution just now, for no peasant in the village or the neighbourhood is willing to sell his property. She spoke of Waltenburg, — of giving the land to Rosel and reserving the ruins for herself; and that might answer, but I have no time to ask Waltenburg what he considers the value of his roofless towers, strip of wood, and half-dozen fields. Now you might make yourself useful and find out all about it. The price is not likely to cause much alarm, for Waltenburg does not expect much, and these Nixones are certainly enormously rich. Mees Nora can do what she pleases with 'papa,' that is evident."

"That was evident to me at Ammergau," said Torp, "when she went to the theatre there, though he and his other daughter remained at the inn in marked disapproval. And here, too, she seems on most occasions to do precisely what she pleases."

"I rejoice in her independence," cried Waldemar, "for, with every inclination to be civil, the old man puts my forbearance severely to the proof by his pomposity, the eldest daughter by her fastidiousness, and the student by his mercurial restlessness. I will have the Mees Nora alone."

"I suspect there are others who would take her on that condition as well as yourself," observed Torp, composedly.

"You do not mean that you would?" asked Waldemar.

"I was thinking just now of your friend Harry Darwin," replied Torp.

"Is not Darwin going to marry one of your sisters?"

"Yes; but he has confessed a six years' flirtation with one of these Miss Nixons (we can easily guess which), as an excuse for not having proposed sooner to my sister; and I now begin to fear that though Jane is a very good girl, and pretty withall, she will not make him quite forget this first long love of his."

"H—m. So you think Mees Nora has been six years in love with him?"

"Off and on — yes."

"Do you mean that she did not care much for him?"

"I mean there were some little heart episodes on her part during his frequent absences from England. He knew all about them, he says, but was enchained either by love or vanity until about two months ago, when, having proposed for my sister, he followed these people abroad to put an end to all their hopes and speculations."

"Mees Nora does not seem likely to die of a broken heart," observed Waldemar.

"On the contrary," said Torp, "she gives me the idea of a person in possession of a whole and even perfectly unscathed one."

"Darwin is a coxcomb," continued Waldemar, "and fancies himself irresistible. The last time he was in Vienna he took it into his head that Irene Schaumberg was in love with him!"

"Did you undeceive him?"

"On the contrary, I rather encouraged him, got Irene to join me, and he afforded us incalculable amusement for some time."

"It is not improbable," said Torp, "that his imagination was at work in this affair with Miss Nixon too. At

all events, I have a great mind to speak of him and sound her on the subject when an opportunity offers."

"Do you care about the matter?" asked Waldemar, with some surprise.

"I ought to, when I consider that Harry will be my brother-in-law next Christmas," answered Torp, evasively. "I must say," he added, thoughtfully, "Jane's indifference on this subject appears to me now perfectly incomprehensible!"

"It is a lucky thing for us that women are so lenient on such occasions," rejoined Waldemar, lightly. "A man has but to offer his hand in an open business-like manner, and, if accepted, no questions are asked about his heart, which may have passed through a blast furnace and be as riddled and worthless as the dross of metal for all that mothers or daughters seem to care! *We* are not quite so unconcerned, Torp, and I confess I feel the greatest desire to know how much of her large warm heart and vivid imagination Mees Nora bestowed on your future brother-in-law. So commence your soundings at once, my good fellow, and let me know the result without any of the reservations you may hereafter think it necessary to observe towards your sister."

He did not wait for an answer, but sprang into the little carriage, spoke a few parting words to the landlady, and drove off.

Torp lingered about the garden and door of the inn, and played with the hideous watch-dog, until chance procured him the information concerning Nora that for some undoubtedly good reason he had not chosen to demand. Madam Cramer sent "to let Miss Nora know that her son Florian had finished the renovation of the

altar of St. Hubert's chapel — perhaps she would step down and look at it before he began to pack it up."

"Miss Nora is not here," said the landlady, her hands resting, as usual, on her ample hips, "nor likely to be until the English dinner-hour. Who would go out in such weather as this, if they could avoid it? But you need not go on to the forest-house in the rain, Vevey," she added, benignant, to the red-haired messenger, who seemed about to prolong her walk in that direction, "I can easily find some one going there who will do your errand."

"I shall be at the forester's in about a quarter of an hour," said Torp, "and can undertake to deliver your message."

"Florian told me to let the young lady know without delay," began Vevey, hesitatingly.

"And," observed the landlady severely, "and Florian never looked out of the window or thought of you or the weather when he did so, that's certain; while you, in your hurry to pleasure him, forgot to take an umbrella or cover your head with a kerchief!"

"It's but a stone's throw," said Vevey, turning away quickly.

"Stay," cried Torp, "there is nothing to prevent my going at once. I was only waiting for letters." And he walked off at a pace that removed all Vevey's anxiety respecting unnecessary delay.

"Gone without an umbrella!" ejaculated the landlady. "That thin summer jacket of his will be well wet through before he reaches the forester's."

"Shall I run after him?" cried Vevey.

"No," said the landlady, "he might take it ill, for you see, Vevey, that Englishman is not like our count,

who, out of pure gratitude for our care and attention, would offer to take two umbrellas instead of one. I know," she added with a laugh, "he'd leave them both at the forester's afterwards, if he did not lose them on the way; for in wraps and umbrellas the count's uncommon careless."

As Torp pushed open the door of the forest-house, and unceremoniously proceeded to enter the dwelling-room, he was as thoroughly wet as the landlady had predicted, though apparently in no way incommoded by his plight, for it was with an air of more than usual serenity, almost suavity, that he entered the little apartment. The forester and his son were arranging a gun-rack at one end of the room, at the other sat Rosel, once more cheerful and blooming, singing gaily, in a loud, clear voice, beside Nora, who, bending over a cither placed on the table before her, was evidently endeavouring to play by ear the highland air that her companion warbled forth with its jodel and endless succession of verses. They were unconscious of Torp's entrance until the forester's fierce abuse of the weather attracted their attention, and his recommendation to Torp to get a woodman's mantle at Madame Cramer's induced them to look round.

Torp delivered his message to Nora.

Her fingers wandered over the strings of the cither, while, between chords and snatches of the air she had been playing, she observed that the weather was almost inclement enough to deter her from a walk to the village, although a rummage in the shop, and a visit to Florian's atelier, were about as pleasant pastimes as could be found in Almenau on a rainy day.

"Do not let my wet coat discourage you, Miss

Nixon," said Torp, seized with a sudden conviction that in her society the shop and atelier would afford him also just then some pleasant pastime, "with an umbrella, a warm shawl, and a pair of galoshes you can brave the weather for so short a distance with perfect impunity."

"I must brave it, at all events, at six o'clock," she answered, musingly.

"Go to Florian's workshop to-morrow, Miss Nora," urged Rosel, coaxingly; "he'll not pack it to-day, for who'd begin anything of a Saturday?"

"And who," rejoined Nora, playfully, "who would go poking into ateliers and shops of a Sunday, Mademoiselle Rosel? Now I might wait until Monday morning perhaps —"

"No, Miss Nora," cried Rosel, hastily, "if the weather clear up at all we're going to St. Hubert's on Monday, and you know — you know —"

"Yes, I know — I know —" said Nora, smiling. "So lend me the great family umbrella, the yellow one that always puts me in mind of a fungus, and I think with a shawl, and a handkerchief tied over my head, I shall manage to get to Madame Cramer's."

She left the room with Rosel, and Torp, while awaiting her reappearance, entered into conversation with the forester and his son. Five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour passed over, and Torp, unwilling to appear impatient, still talked on, waiting another full quarter of an hour before he opened the door of the room and looked into the passage and up the staircase. Rosel was standing at the top of the latter, singing a popular verse of a very popular song, in which a too cautious and prudent lover is sarcastically advised to wrap up his heart in paper, bind it round with green

ribbon, and put it carefully into some place where the dust cannot injure it.

Torp laughed, and asked if Miss Nixon were ready.

"Ready!" repeated Rosel, "she must be at Madame Cramer's by this time. I asked her," she continued, "I asked her if she would not take you or Franz to hold the umbrella, but she said she liked better being alone, as she could tuck up her gown pleasanter."

Torp left the forest-house with an air of perfect unconcern, but he remembered with some mortification that Nora had not thought about "tucking up her gown" the day before, when Waldemar had offered his services. The storm and rain, too, brought vividly to his recollection the day he had passed with her in precisely such weather among the mountains, and the evening afterwards at the fisherman's house; and he recalled, with feelings of regret, his ungracious, repulsive conduct at the latter place, and the fact that he had then and there been little less than ungentlemanlike in order to prove to her that a Miss Nixon had nothing to expect from him but Christian charity! He had forced her to retaliate, she had done so with lady-like indifference; and now what would he not give for another day's wandering under the same circumstances, or any opportunity to prove that he was not quite the churl she took him for! These thoughts strenghtened his already formed resolution no longer so scrupulously to avoid her society during the short time they were still likely to be together in the village; and therefore, instead of reading his letters and looking over his newspapers, he hurried after her to Florian's atelier, and when there felt or feigned extraordinary interest in the renovated altar, and the legend of Saint Hubert related at some length by the highly

flattered artist. When Nora regretted that the altar would not be in its place on Monday, and promised to make a pilgrimage to see it there before she left Almenau, Torp entered into a similar engagement, and said it was even very probable that he should accompany Florian to St. Hubert's on Monday, "Where," he added, turning to Nora, "I believe you are also going about the same time?"

"If it be possible," she answered, not looking particularly delighted at the prospect of his society.

"I expect to find Waldemar in the chapel," he continued.

"Very likely," she replied; "he told me he intended to make coloured sketches of the altars there." While speaking it flashed across her mind that Torp might suppose a meeting with his friend was her inducement to go, "if it were possible," to St. Hubert's; she therefore felt it necessary to explain, and added quietly, "I should have preferred waiting for finer weather than we are likely to have on Monday, but Seppel has received work as wood-cleaver from the forester, and must go on that day to the clearing in the neighbourhood of the Miller's alp. St. Hubert's is not much out of his way and he and Rosel intend to pray in the chapel together, and make a vow."

"A sort of private betrothal," suggested Torp, "instead of the public one that was to have taken place yesterday."

"Perhaps so," said Nora. "At all events the forester gave his consent at my request, and I have promised Seppel and Rosel to be present."

"And to pray with them?" asked Torp.

"Why not?" said Nora, "both with them and for them!"

"Pray for me, too, Miss Nixon," said Torp.

"You are jesting and I am serious, Mr. Torp," she answered, composedly; "but you cannot know, nor have I any inclination to explain to you, the strong personal interest I feel in the welfare of these people."

"Waldemar has informed me of your generous plans for them," said Torp, "and desired me to obtain the information you require about Waltenburg."

"I am much obliged to him and to you for your kind intentions," observed Nora, "but it is quite unnecessary that you should give yourself this trouble. The judge is expected here to-morrow, and from him I can hear not only all about Waltenburg, but of everything else that is to be had in the neighbourhood."

Torp felt half offended at not being employed, as he doubted not that Waldemar would have been had he remained in the village; but scarcely had Nora left the atelier, before he acknowledged to himself that she was quite right to refuse his services until he had removed the unpleasant impression made by his previous conduct on herself and her family. As to making advances of any kind to the latter, that was totally out of the question: he could merely learn to tolerate them for her sake, and with that effort on his part she must learn to be satisfied. Like his friend Waldemar, he "would have the Miss Nora alone," so he followed her to the shop, and found her standing behind the counter, an amused listener of the bargaining going on between Madame Cramer and an old peasant woman about some printed calico, both appealing to her as umpire, and loudly deprecating, protesting, and expostulating, as they kreutzerwise drew towards an agreement.

On the counter lay a green felt hat, and a wood-

man's mantle. "The very thing I want!" cried Torp, taking up the latter and throwing it over his head, which after a struggle he succeeded in protruding through the slid made for that purpose, "long enough and a good fit too. Can I have it?" he asked, turning to Madame Cramer.

"No," said Nora, "that one belongs to me. I had it made for an acquaintance who wants it on Monday, but I can shew you the material, and another can easily be ready before evening." She mounted the shop ladder, and took down a large pack of coarse, rough, dark green cloth, which she spread before him, feeling the texture and recommending it with all the earnestness of an experienced shopkeeper.

Torp was exceedingly amused, and not a little pleased, when she offered to give the necessary directions to have it made exactly like the one he had tried on, which was intended for long Seppel.

"I should like a hat such as you have chosen for him also," he said, beginning to try on the broad-brimmed low-crowned, and narrow-rimmed high-crowned hats that were piled over each other in heaps just behind him, turning continually to Nora, and apparently more inclined to consult her face than the slip of blue looking-glass placed near a window for the convenience of other customers.

"This will do," he said, at length, "and now, Miss Nixon, I should be infinitely obliged to you if you would remove this chamois beard from my English wide-awake, on which it is so exceedingly misplaced, and fasten it on this new and more picturesque hat, where, with a tuft of black-cock feathers, it will look equally spruce and appropriate!"

Nora felt that, having commenced playing at shop-keeping, she could not refuse to go on. "Have you feathers?" she asked.

"No, but I have shot such quantities of black-cock in Scotland, that I have no scruple in wearing bought ones."

Again Nora mounted the ladder, and, after a short search, found the box containing a few real, and a good many imitation chamois beards, some tufts of black-cock and other feathers, knots of green ribbon, with gold fringe, and a profusion of tinsel and spangles.

Torp seated himself on the counter, and looked on with an air of immense satisfaction. "Am I not to have a bunch of real flowers?" he asked.

"No, you are a sportsman, and not a peasant," she replied, without looking up.

"Is there nothing else you can give me?" he said, gazing round the shop, when he perceived her work nearly completed. "I am sure I want something else if I could only recollect what it is."

"Your bill perhaps," suggested Nora, demurely.

"Exactly. You will write it for me, — won't you?"

Nora drew some paper towards her, took up a pencil, wrote, counted, shewed it to Madame Cramer, who nodded her head, and then handed it to Torp, who perceived, with astonishment, that it was faultlessly written in free *German* handwriting, which differs from the English as much as does the type of their books.

"Miss Nixon," he said eagerly, "you really must allow me to ask you how and where you have acquired this perfect knowledge of —"

But Nora did not choose to be questioned, and

turned from him to sell a packet of snuff to the old schoolmaster, while Madame Cramer, taking her place, reiterated the promise that he should have his mantle that very evening. "There is not an hour's work upon it," she said, in explanation, "merely an opening for the head, a hook and eye to close it round the neck, and a seam on the shoulders! If the workwoman has not time, I'll stitch it up myself for you."

Torp lingered after the material for his mantle had been cut off, the counter cleared, and all the other customers had left the shop. He seemed to feel the most intense interest in the rows of penny trumpets, whistles, wooden cows, horses, sheep, and other rough toys that were ranged on a low shelf, in order to be within the reach of children, happy in the possession of a few kreutzers. Nora had seated herself on the ladder, and after vainly awaiting his departure for some time, said to Madame Cramer, in a low voice, "Have you spoken to the miller and his wife?"

"Yes."

"What did they say?"

"Just what I expected. They're more than willing to sell the mill, if they can get a good price for it. The miller, who is not good for much in the way of work, wishes to emigrate to Tyrol, and settle in the neighbourhood of Madeleine, now that she has consented to marry black Seppel, — and, what is better than all, the Tyrolean himself approves of the plan, and has promised me fifty florins if I can manage to negotiate a fair price with you."

"And what does he consider a fair price?" asked Nora.

"The house, with the buildings belonging to the

mill, he values at six thousand florins, the land round it, and the half of the Trift alp, about as much more. He says the legal valuation is little less, and they can easily find a purchaser any day, if they advertise."

Torp turned round to see the impression that this communication made on Nora; the movement seemed to remind her of his presence, for she rose, took up long Seppel's mantle and hat from the counter, and paused before she said, "I am much obliged to you, Madame Cramer, for the trouble you have taken in this matter, and now only request a short time to consider the proposal. On Tuesday, however," she added, turning round at the door, "on Tuesday morning you shall have an answer, and in the afternoon of the same day I shall go to the mill, and ask the people there to show it to me."

Torp followed her out of the shop, and proposed carrying the mantle and hat with which she had, as he thought, so unnecessarily burdened herself. She resigned them to his care without demur or apology, graciously permitting him, at the same time, to hold the wide-spreading yellow umbrella over her head while she walked to the inn in unusual and profound silence; but when there she again took them from him. Torp saw, or thought he saw, an expression of more than amusement, a look of mirthful exultation, in her dark eyes that the demurely smiling mouth vainly endeavoured to neutralize. Without listening to her thanks, he passed on, mounted the stairs, and on entering his room came to the hasty conclusion that she had mistaken his waiting for her in the shop for vulgar curiosity, and his civility afterwards, for — something more than civility — women were so prone to fancy men in love with

them! "Now, though I do admire her," thought Torp, "I cannot let her suppose that I have lost my heart, or mean to be more than commonly polite, and it will be necessary for me to convince her, without delay, that nothing but idleness and bad weather made me follow her to Florian's atelier to-day. Even if I go to St. Hubert's on Monday I shall take care to let her perceive that a meeting with Waldemar, and not her society, is my inducement to make the excursion."

Among the letters that had arrived by that day's post, was one from his sister Jane; he took it up hastily, and read — "So glad you are enjoying yourself, and have such good sport — remember Count Benndorff perfectly — dark eyes — Roman nose — mazurka dancer. People said he was going to be married to a Countess Somebody, the widow of a friend or cousin of his. Harry Darwin is not yet with us. He *will* not write about his sister, so I suppose she has turned out a disagreeable person, and has been spoiled by her sudden accession to fortune. In his last letter he said he considered it scarcely generous my questioning him so often about the Gilbert Nixons — he did not know where they were now, but when he left them in Munich they intended to pass through Tyrol into Italy. Now, I do wish you could manage to meet them somewhere or other: they will of course be delighted to know you, and you can then write me a short description of the woman who has been my rival for six long years. I cannot remember ever having seen her in town, though Harry thinks I have: she has dark hair and eyes, and *he* says is lady-like and accomplished."

Torp put down the letter. "Actually requested to become acquainted with her!" he ejaculated. "Oh, Jane!

for your sake I hope Harry may not often again see this rival of whom you write so flippantly."

In the meantime Nora had gone to her uncle Gilbert, and the look of exultation that had so alarmed Torp's pride was still on her countenance, as she explained her plans and expatiated on the pleasure she felt in being able to purchase the mountain mill, the place of all others that Rosel loved best in the neighbourhood. "Of course," she added, "a clause shall be inserted in the deed of gift, making it incumbent on every future possessor of the mill to take care of and decorate dear Arthur's grave. I believe I shall require something more than a thousand pounds for the purchase, and let you know in time, in case it should be necessary to write to England."

Mr. Nixon opened his eyes very wide, made no attempt to conceal his astonishment, remonstrated at some length, and ended with the remark that he had never heard of anything so absurd as allowing the expense of keeping a grave in order so preposterously to exceed the price of the tomb-stone!

"Such was Arthur's desire," said Nora.

"Now, my dear Nora, how *can* you know that?"

"He spoke to me several times on the subject."

"But he could not know that he would die here," expostulated Mr. Nixon.

"He thought it was probable he might die abroad, and, when wishing for a simple tombstone, hoped that his grave might not be remarkable for its neglected state, as was the case with most English graves on the continent. To prevent this is *my* care, to ensure the contrary *my* promise; and I think I have found the most effectual

way of keeping it, if I do not resolve to rebuilt the castle on the hill, and live here myself for the purpose."

Mr. Nixon thought it better to attempt no further opposition.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Vow.

It was a rainy Sunday morning. Mr. and Miss Nixon had not yet given any sign of wakefulness, though the neighbouring church bell had been for some time summoning the villagers to divine service, and noises of endless variety, and of a nature most likely to dispel sleep, had long succeeded each other, without interruption. The Nixons had, however, become accustomed to the sound of rushing feet on uncarpeted stairs and the tramping of nailed shoes on the floors of echoing corridors; and even the rough opening and shutting of the folding doors, or rather gates into the granary on the first floor of the house, and the frequent entrance and unloading of carts full of corn, had ceased materially to affect their slumbers; though it was perhaps the Sunday cessation of these last peculiarly disturbing sounds, with the accompanying stamping of horses' feet, and vociferous calls of the labourers, that enabled them to enjoy so long a sleep on the present occasion.

Torp was more wakeful. Stretched at full length on half-a-dozen chairs, he had so placed himself in the vicinity of an open window, that he could command an extensive view of the mountains that enclosed the village, and watch the different groups of peasants as they hurried over the fields and along the pathways, in all directions, towards the church. Most of them had to

pass the inn, and had Torp been so disposed, he might have found subject for reflection in the gradual and not pleasing approaches towards Parisian fashions, evident in the dress of many of them. It has been observed that these national costumes have at all times been modified by the changes in dress so frequent in the cities of Europe; but so slowly have the alterations been adopted, that an interval of thirty or forty years generally intervenes, and the large, leg-of-mutton shaped sleeves, and short petticoats, worn by the women, seem to confirm the supposition, though their boddices and head-dresses are of much more ancient date, and do not appear likely to be put aside for some years. The innovations attempted by the men are of a more serious and modern description, and peculiarly disadvantageous to both face and figure. A round black hat of any form that has been in fashion during the last ten years, a short waisted coat with puckered sleeves, both manufactured by the privileged hatter and tailor of the village, and added to these, a pair of wide, ill-fitting trousers, that when but half worn out present an unpleasant picture of shabby gentility verging towards blackguardism.

Torp was too practical a man to waste either reflection or regret on the changes in the costume of peasants so little likely to be seen by him during the remainder of his life; he merely thought the old men looked withered and weather-beaten, the old women ugly and masculine. Waldemar was not at his side to point out the more picturesque figures, and before long he unconsciously began to mentally measure the colossal limbs and burly waists of all the passing women, overseeing many a young and handsome face while coming to the conclusion that the fair sex in and about Almenau were of peculiarly

clumsy proportions. As if to qualify in some degree this judgment, the slender figure of the "miller's Madeleine" became just then visible, as she tripped along the road accompanied by her parents and Tyrolean Seppel, attired in his brown national dress, broad belt, and high-crowned hat. They returned the salutations of their neighbours and friends cordially, but spoke not a word to each other as they hastened to pass the inn, followed at no great distance by the forester, his family, and Nora.

The latter party stopped beneath Torp's window for a few minutes, and seemed to discuss some subject with unusual earnestness. At length he heard Nora say, while she looked at her watch, "Plenty of time to reach the town before the church service there begins, and quite needless your subjecting yourself to so much unnecessary pain."

"I can bear it, Miss Nora," said Franz, in reply; "and that they shall see, especially the Tyrolean."

"He's right," said the forester; "they must see or they won't believe that we can get over our disappointment."

The father and son walked on together, followed more slowly by Rosel and her mother. Nora looked after them thoughtfully, until they were out of sight, waited until the last loiterers about the inn had gone to church, and then turned into a by-path that led directly to a small gate opening into the burial-ground. It was among the latest stragglers that she entered the crowded place of worship, and, concealed from the greater part of the congregation by one of the pillars supporting the organ-loft, heard the sermon that was preached quietly and impressively by the worthy priest, and in which peace and good-will were strongly recommended, and

earnest warnings offered against that "little member," the tongue. Nora was too well acquainted with the frame of mind then predominant in the village not to understand that much that was said was intended to counteract or suppress the loud animadversions in which most people indulged when speaking of the miller and his family, and every meaning glance exchanged among the peasants around, every moving arm that expressively nudged another, conveyed its meaning to her likewise.

Profound was the silence when soon after the bans of marriage were published between Joseph Mattner, possessor of the upper mill, near X, in the Valley of the Inn, and Madeleine, daughter of Jacob Erdman, mountain miller, of the village of Almenau, &c., &c., and a sort of subdued commotion in the congregation, accompanied by an almost universal stretching of necks, became evident. A few stray glances sought the bent-down head of Madeleine, but most eyes were fixed on the forester and his family. The old man's furrowed features had assumed an air of defiance, his son's face and figure might have served for a model of stern and rigid self-control, yet Nora thought she detected a slight distension of the nostrils and a scarcely perceptible twitching of the moustache, which latter, according to Sir Charles Bell, is capable of expression during passionate excitement, in consequence of the action of a muscle under the roots of the hair. There were probably not many such nice observers in the crowd, but Nora felt that her thoughts were giving utterance, when a voice immediately behind her murmured in English, "Poor fellow! it is a hard trial; I am heartily sorry for him." These words were pronounced with so much warmth and feeling that she could not leave them unanswered.

"There was no help for it, if what the people here say be true," she whispered in reply, while leaving the church by the nearest door.

"What do they say?" asked Torp, following her.

"That the miller is in the power of this Tyrolean, who is supposed to have had something to do with the burning of the old mill at a very critical juncture."

"Was there no investigation at the time?"

"Of course, but no proof could be obtained; the miller was from home, the Tyrolean actually lost all his clothes in the flames; and his efforts to save the few valuables belonging to the miller's wife and daughter told so much in his favour that the suspicions would have died away had not his imperious conduct at the mill kept them alive, and the breaking off of this marriage just now renewed them in every one's mind. I remember at Ammergau hearing some hints on the subject that excited my curiosity."

"Is it possible," cried Torp, "that even there you began to feel an interest in these people?"

"Why not?" she rejoined. "I heard they were inhabitants of the village to which we were going. Perhaps their ancestors had been, or they themselves might hereafter be, laid in a grave next to the one confided to my charge; — that alone caused an indefinite feeling of interest, and my first visit to the churchyard made me feel as if I had had a presentiment — for you see the tombstone of the mountain miller family is the one next to that of my cousin Arthur; and I am not ashamed to confess that this circumstance has greatly increased my desire to see Rosel in possession of the mill."

"I should never have supposed you would attach importance to anything of this kind," said Torp; "it is,

in fact, so very immaterial where one is buried, or who is one's neighbour when in the grave."

"That is an English idea, but in Germany people think differently," replied Nora.

"Most families in England have their tombs, or, at least, burying-places —" began Torp.

"You mean people of large fortune, and landed proprietors," said Nora, "who have damp vaults under the churches, which, only visited when the remains of a relation are to be deposited in them, are regarded with horror by the survivors. The greater number of people in England are, however, buried in the churchyard nearest the place where they die; and, even when monuments are erected by the more wealthy, who ever thinks of visiting them, or caring for them? Give me anything English but a grave!" She sat down on the low wall while adding, "I hope I may yet find a resting-place in the cheerful churchyard of some German village — here, perhaps, beside my cousin Arthur."

"Well, I must say," rejoined Torp, seating himself beside her, and stooping until he had obtained shelter under her umbrella, "I must say the cheerfulness of this place is not particularly remarkable to-day."

"It is quite as cheerful as elsewhere," persisted Nora. "You will soon see it full of people, who, notwithstanding the rain, will linger about the graves. In the afternoon many of them will return: the church itself is seldom without some pious visitor, for its doors are open at all hours during the week; and, in fine weather, the sun shines here the live-long day."

Torp looked at her intently, and smiled. "If," he said, clasping his hands round his crossed knees, "if it were only possible to imagine, I will not say believe,

that the people beneath these mounds could enjoy the — the sunshine and — a — the company —”

“Not at all necessary,” answered Nora, rising, as the congregation began to issue in crowds from the church. “Thoughts such as mine about churchyards are unconsciously cheering, consoling to the living; for few can ever mentally so completely divest themselves of their bodies as to be quite indifferent to what may become of it after death. I have the weakness to wish that mine may rest in sunshine; that, as I now stand by my consin’s grave, and think of him, relations and friends may stand by mine and —” She stopped suddenly, the dreary thought that she had neither relations nor friends who would ever think of her grave, however they might perchance regret her death, came over her mind like a dark cloud; tears started to her eyes, and she turned hastily away to meet the forester and long Seppel, for whom she had been waiting.

“Downrightly and sincerely sentimental,” thought Torp; “and, some way, she has infected me, too; for, after all, I rather like what she said about sunshine — and — aw — going to a fellow’s grave and talking of him —”

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Although Torp was quite resolved to convince Nora that his heart was still his own, and that she had no chance of obtaining from him more attention than civility required, he might have been seen by her, and her tolerably numerous escort, several times during the ascent to the chapel the next morning, had they been tempted to look around or beneath them. The fact was,

Nora had observed his absence with great satisfaction when Florian had joined them accompanied only by two men who were engaged to carry the renovated altar to St. Hubert's, and she had hurried forward, hoping that Torp would be altogether deterred from making the excursion when he ascertained that he had been left to find his way alone to a place where there was but a slight chance of meeting his friend on such a gloomy day. She was mistaken. Torp was resolved to keep what he chose to consider an appointment with Walde-mar, and we may suppose, as he did pertinaciously, that ignorance of the path was his sole inducement to follow so undeviatingly the well-known grey dress and wide-spreading hat.

Nora, as has been observed, did not look round her as was her wont, for, although the weather had cleared during the night, dark wreaths of cloud still hung on the mountains, leaving only their bases and summits visible at intervals. The long-continued rain and storm had apparently completely weather-beaten the trees, the leaves clung to each other and drooped downwards, while on the branches of the less-sensitive pines and firs large globules of water rolled backwards and forwards, ready to fall on the slightest provocation. Though the dripping trees in the wood and the marshy meadows beyond rather retarded and inconvenienced most members of the party, they braved the discomforts of the way exultingly, happy in the consciousness that they were taking what is called "advantage" of one of those "short cuts" in which most foresters delight, but which it would be better if women avoided, at least during or after rain. The guiding forester alone ventured to express the satisfaction he felt when they got upon the well-beaten path

leading directly to the chapel and into Tyrol: he stamped his feet on the hard gravelly ground, and began to point out a variety of objects to Nora that he had been judicious enough to avoid mentioning while she had been labouring after him, over the slippery roots of trees or through passages of coal-black mud.

A right pleasant and romantic path it was on which they now walked quickly forward, and when a new peak broke unexpectedly through the surrounding clouds they all hailed it as a harbinger of better weather. While they were still following the course of a small stream through a narrow gorge in the mountains, the sharp cry of a hawk attracted their attention. The forester stopped, unslung his rifle, and peered eagerly round: long Seppel sprang to his side, and pointed up the stream to where the bird, majestically soaring, seemed about to pass over their heads. "Try your hand, Sepp," cried the forester, magnanimously handing him the rifle; and the young man, springing on a fragment of rock, aimed and fired with a rapidity that delighted the old man, who, as the bird fell at no great distance, splashed through the water to pick it up; and, on seeing that it was quite dead, and with scarcely a feather ruffled, he gave Seppel such a slap on the shoulder, and shove of approbation, that he sent him reeling against Rosel, who stood the shock unshrinkingly, and, with sparkling eyes and smiling lips, called him "a great awkward boy," and bid him "get out of her way."

Florian's two men, who had taken the opportunity of resting, now raised their packs on their shoulders and commenced the ascent to the chapel, the white spire of which was visible far above them in the wood. Rosel and Nora followed, leaving Seppel to assist the forester

to bag the bird, and re-load his rifle. These loiterers Torp joined, and, after about three quarters of an hour's gradual, but steep, ascent, they reached the isolated building. Rosel and Nora had already entered; Seppel hurried after them; Torp followed slowly. The chapel was small, very massively built, with long narrow windows at each side, and so surrounded by trees that it was only on peculiarly bright days the sun's rays could enter and light up its far-famed altars. Seppel and Rosel knelt before the centre one, which was in a sort of semi-circular protuberance in the building, and gorgeously gilt and painted; the others, at each side, were more within the church, one of them already renovated, the other about to be restored to its place that day by Florian. Leaning with her elbows on the railing that enclosed the vacant space, usually occupied by the latter, stood Nora, and Torp would have given much to have obtained an undetected glance at her face, as it rested on her clasped hands; but, true to his resolution of taking no notice of her that could be avoided, he waited patiently until Seppel and Rosel stood up, and then advanced to the altar they had left, bowing very slightly to Nora as he passed her. Quick as the salutation was on both sides, Torp perceived that her's was accompanied by a look of surprise totally unmingled with pleasure, in fact, rather the contrary; and while he stood, to all appearance, absorbed in the contemplation of the altar, he was considering, and deeply too, what he could have done or said to make his presence, just then, disagreeable.

Outside the chapel Rosel and Seppel were taking leave of each other. It was but for a week, yet they stood hand in hand, and seemed with difficulty to repress their tears.

"Come, Seppel, we must be moving," observed the forester, with an attempt at cheerfulness he was far from feeling, for every day and hour made him more regret having yielded to his choleric temper at a time when a little forbearance would have ensured the happiness of his daughter. "It's only for a while, you know," he continued, "and to keep you out of temptation, as it were. Miss Nora has promised to set all to rights again, and she wouldn't have pledged herself if her papa had not allowed her."

Nora smiled at the doubt so shrewdly expressed, but gave no further affirmation then a slight nod of encouragement to Seppel, who, after vainly endeavouring to speak, held out his hand to her, and then slung his green linen pouch over his shoulder in a resolute manner. "God bless you, Rosel!" he said, with ill-concealed emotion; "on Saturday evening I shall be down in the village for a fresh supply of flour and butter, and to remain the Sunday. Take my greetings to my mother, and tell my father and brother I bear no malice."

"Where are you going, forester?" asked Tórp, who was already at the door of the chapel.

"To the clearing above the miller's alp," he answered; "Seppel has offered to fell timber there, and must begin work with the other men about nine o'clock, so we have no time to lose."

"How far is the alp from here?"

"Two hours' smart walking," he replied. "The chapel was out of our way, but we can make up for lost time by cutting across the Rocky Horn."

"I have a great mind to go with you," said Tórp, "if you can wait a few minutes until I have made some

inquiries at the sexton's." Here he glanced towards Nora, and perceived an expression of such unmistakeable satisfaction on her countenance, that he suddenly changed his mind, and, prompted alike by curiosity and mortification, resolved to remain and — watch her. He looked up towards the sky, however, before he added, "After all, perhaps, I had better wait for finer weather; but don't forget to let me know the next time you go to the clearing above the miller's alp, as I want to see how you manage these things in Bavaria."

The forester and Seppel walked off at the steady quiet pace of highlanders when on their mountains; the latter looking back occasionally, as long as they were in sight, flourishing his hat in the air, and at length uttering the long loud popular jodel of his native village. Nora, who had been examining the altar as Florian unpacked it, now turned round, waved her handkerchief encouragingly above her head, looking so animated and hopeful, that Rosel, with tears still in her eyes, sprang forward, and gave the answering jodel; the altar-bearers shouted in the same strain; and even Torp found himself moved to raise his hat and utter a few of those long-drawn Ohs! and Ahs! which, from their frequent recurrence in the conversation of Englishmen, malicious Germans pretend to consider a part of our language.

"Meister Florian," said Nora, turning once more to the interrupted contemplation of the renovated altar-piece, "I wish you would carve me a copy of this alto-relievo, unpainted, and with any improvements you think necessary in the figures."

"If you can wait until next year," answered Florian, "and let me have the long winter evenings to work at it, I should have no objection to the undertaking; al-

though I have never yet attempted anything on so large a scale."

"I should rather prefer your reducing the figures one half," said Nora, "as they are not to be viewed at a distance like these, but," she added, on perceiving Torp approaching, "we can talk the matter over at your house to-morrow — though, stay, — not to-morrow, as I have promised to go to the mill on business — the day after — no — the day after, if things turn out, as I hope they will, I must go to the miller's alp, — but on Thursday I shall be quite at liberty. Let us say Thursday, Meister Florian, and now, if you will come with me to the sexton's house, you shall have a cup of his wife's best coffee."

Florian declined the invitation with evident regret. He could not leave the chapel until his work in it was completed.

"Can other people get coffee at the sexton's as well as you, Miss Nixon?" asked Torp.

"Anybody, and everybody," she answered cheerfully, beginning the descent to the house, of which the chimney and roof were visible, at no great distance beneath them.

"Will you have the kindness, Miss Nixon," said Torp, making a last effort to convince her of his indifference to her society, "will you have the kindness to tell Waldemar that I shall be with him directly?"

"If I find him at the sexton's I shall give him your message," she answered, with such perfect unconcern, that Torp, unconsciously rejoicing in the perception of her indifference to his friend, stood looking after her even when the trees had hid her from his sight, and

then, having walked up and down the uneven plateau on which the chapel was built, he sat down in the wooden porch of the building, until he thought that he might descend to the sexton's without betraying too much *empressement* to join her.

Nora, seated before the house, at a small table that had been brought out of one of the rooms, was, as he approached, just dismissing a boy, who had been standing beside her, with the words, "Tell your grandfather I know he must have a note or letter from the gentleman for me, and then come back here directly, for I shall want you to show me the way."

Whatever doubts Torp might have hitherto entertained as to the nature of his feelings towards Nora, they were removed at that moment by a painful consciousness of sudden and intense jealousy. Not that he was so irrational as to suppose that she had planned or even consented to a direct rendezvous with Waldemar, though he had now no doubt she had both hoped and expected to meet him. Her desire to see him might be partly caused by a wish to consult him about the purchase of Waltenburg, or the mountain mill; but that she had written to him was at least more than probable, otherwise she could not be so certain that she should find a letter from him at St. Hubert's! And then — to what place was the boy to show her the way?

Now Torp's presence was anything but agreeable to Nora at that moment; so she left the table, and went to meet the sexton, who was coming from the field, where he had been digging potatoes, and contrived to join him, when still so distant from the house, that their conversation could not be overheard.

"I believe," she said, making a sign to him to keep

on his hat, "I believe you have got a note for me from the gentleman who is lodging at your son-in-law's house, on the Tyrolean side of the frontiers?"

"Oh, you're the lady that's to call for the letter," he answered, deliberately taking a pinch of snuff; "and I was thinking of sending it to the village by Florian this very afternoon! Wastl," he added, turning to his grandson, who stood beside him, "tell your grandmother to give you the paper that's been lying so long on the dresser in the kitchen."

"The gentleman," he continued, accosting Nora, "the gentleman has had but little sport, and very rough weather, miss, and accordingly finds the time hang heavy; he came up here yesterday, and said he didn't know what to do with himself."

"I think he had better return to Almenau with me," said Nora.

"He's more likely to go further into Tyrol and take his pleasure, without having to consult forester or assistant-forester," answered the sexton, taking another pinch of snuff.

Just then Wastl returned with a very slovenly-folded soiled note. Nora opened it and read: —

"Send the boy for me, and then come to a place called the Riven Rock. Should that tiresome fellow, Torp, be in the way, as usual, you must manage to get off without his observing you, as he is the last person I wish to meet just now."

"Have you time to go to this gentleman, who is lodging at your father's?" asked Nora, turning to Wastl.

"Oh, yes, plenty of time."

"And, when you have told him that I am here, will you return and show me the way to the Riven Rock?"

The boy nodded, and ran off, and Nora, not choosing Torp to see her tear the note, and equally unwilling to put it, daubed with butter and smelling of cheese, into her pocket, crumpled it in her hand into a pellet, which she threw away, and then sat down, and waited for her coffee, with what Torp considered the perfection of self-possession. He, himself, relapsed into the cold, imperturbable manner that had marked the commencement of their acquaintance, but which was completely unobserved by Nora, as she politely offered him coffee, and supplied him with fresh rolls from Rosel's basket. While *they* talked of shrines and chapels in the woods, and vows made and performed, *he* bent over and fed a hideous dog, with cropped ears and tail, and was so interested in this occupation that he only looked up for a moment when Wastl unexpectedly came back, and, running up to Nora, informed her, in a panting and but too audible whisper, "that he had met the gentleman from Tyrol coming up to St. Hubert's, and that he was now waiting for her at the Riven Rock."

Nora seemed annoyed, but not embarrassed, as she left the table. Rosel entered the house, and Torp, relaxing in his attentions to the dog, the animal sniffed about under the adjacent trees until he found the letter thrown there, in a form that induced him first to snap it up, and, after a few capers, to bound towards Torp, at whose feet he dropped it.

Torp kicked it away with some violence.

The dog had evidently been taught to "seek;" he

rushed after and soon returned with the half-open letter, laid it on the ground, and commenced barking and springing at a little distance, as if waiting for a continuation of the game.

Torp could now have read every word, but he did not even glance at the handwriting as he roughly crumpled it up again, and, rising hastily, threw it as far away as possible.

"I won't believe this without stronger proof," he thought. "Indiscreet she may be, — and romantic she is, in her own peculiar way, but nothing worse. Yet I could almost wish that, after all, this rendezvous with Waldemar might prove a vulgar fact, and be ascertained with my own eyes in the course of the next half hour — it would be the only certain means of preventing me from wasting a thought, still less a regret, on her for the rest of my life."

He descended the mountain in the direction that had been taken by her, and soon found himself among rocks of every description, excepting such as the one he sought, and had just resolved to go on into Tyrol, and make inquiries at the frontier inn, when he encountered Wastl walking slowly homewards, his head bent over one of his hands, in which he held a variety of small coins, that he counted over and over again with childish delight.

"Did the gentleman from Tyrol give you all that money?" asked Torp.

The boy looked up and nodded.

"Show me the way to the Riven Rock, and I will give you as much more."

Wastl turned round, walked about fifty yards, and then pointed downwards to a large grotesquely shaped

rock, that seemed to have burst asunder in some sudden manner, and so formed a narrow passage with accurately corresponding walls at each side.

Torp gave the promised kreutzers.

"If you go straight through the rock," said Wastl, "straight through to the end, and cry boo-oo-oo, they'll get a jolly fright!"

Torp half smiled, but did not profit by the advice; on the contrary, he made a considerable circuit, in order to approach them from the other side; and it was with a sort of grim satisfaction that he caught the first glimpse of the two figures seated beneath the overhanging rock, and speaking too eagerly to be aware of the approach of any one. The gentleman from Tyrol was playing rather cavalierly with the ribbons of Nora's hat; but though only seen in profile, there was no mistaking Waldemar's jaunty peasant dress, and Torp was just about to advance and accost him, when he remembered that he had promised his friend never again to interrupt a *tête-à-tête* with Nora. He therefore walked to some distance below them, and sauntered slowly past, as if unconscious of their presence, but fully resolved to go on to the little inn on the frontiers, and there await Waldemar's return.

"Nora," cried Jack, "there he is, squinting up at us. I knew he would come after you to find out where I was hiding."

"He is not thinking of you," she answered, quietly. "I am quite sure he is going to the inn, to make inquiries about that good-natured gentleman-like Count Waldemar, whom he expected to meet at St. Hubert's to-day."

"Then I must return to the inn at once, to prevent his hearing more about me than is necessary."

"He knows all about you already, Jack, and was as silent as either of us could have desired."

"Suppose, however, Seppel should happen to come up and be seen by him —"

"Not the slightest danger. Seppel has just gone with the forester to the wood above the miller's alp."

Jack started to his feet with a look of uneasiness, and began to pace backwards and forwards, impatiently.

"You fear, perhaps," said Nora, "that I am going to continue my jeremiade, as you call it, about Seppel, but you are mistaken. I was going to add that I have discovered a way of setting all to rights again."

"I always said you were a brick, Norry," cried Jack, "and, were you to talk for two hours, you could not make me more sorry than I am for this confounded occurrence — I mean misfortune. If I had not sworn to keep the secret I should now return with you, and acknowledge all to the judge."

"For what purpose?" asked Nora. "Seppel has been acquitted, for want of evidence against him, and his brother is now in actual possession of the Crag."

"That's it," cried Jack, "that's what vexes me. I thought the worst that could come of it would be a couple of days' arrest for the poor fellow, and never heard a word about the Crag until you explained the matter to me just now."

"Never — heard — a word about the Crag," repeated Nora, "that is strange, if, as you tell me, you saw him yesterday evening, for at that time the cession of the property was completed, and Seppel knew it. Could a feeling of generosity on his part —"

"No, no," cried Jack, interrupting her, "you don't understand me — he feared that I — that he — in

short, I cannot, must not, dare not, explain. It has been a chapter of accidents from beginning to end, and there is no use in talking any more about it. I am sorry for what has happened, and the next time I have fifty pounds to spare, I shall give it to this poor fellow."

Nora smiled. She knew that Jack was never likely to have fifty pounds to spare.

"I will indeed, Nora. And now," he continued, seating himself again beside her, "tell me how you intend to make all straight."

She related her plan, and he warmly approved, calling her a dear, generous girl, and declaring, whatever other people might think, he considered it a fortunate circumstance that she had inherited their uncle's fortune instead of his brother Sam.

"But as to my going back with you to the village, Nora, you cannot expect me to think of such a thing, now that the weather is clearing up."

"Then promise me, at least, not to disgrace yourself by turning poacher again."

"I wish you would be civil, Nora, and remember that I prefer the word wildschütz," he answered laughing; "but, in point of fact, I am an innocent wildschütz, — by accident, as one may say, and only occasionally, when not quite certain of the exact boundaries between Austria and Bavaria."

"What do you mean?"

"You see," he replied, gravely, "some peasants in Tyrol rent part of the chase about the frontiers here — perhaps they get it because it was suspected they would hunt at all events, perhaps not, that is no business of mine. For a trifling consideration, they have given me

leave to shoot on their ground — and let me tell you, Nora, that I now infinitely prefer going out with a party of these daring fellows, to any regular hunt with your friend Waldemar — that is, supposing him encumbered by such companions as the gruff old forester, and that cold-blooded curmudgeon Torp!”

“But,” observed Nora, thoughtfully, “but if you were hunting in Tyrol, what brought you to the Wild Alp, which is completely on the Bavarian side of the mountains?”

“How sharp you are!” cried Jack, with a laugh; “you see, dear, the two countries are not separated by either paling or hedge, and there is a confusing similarity in their appearance hereabouts; so it happens occasionally, quite by accident of course, that one passes the frontiers, and all at once finds oneself turned into a wildschütz, and, what is infinitely worse, into a target for the first Bavarian forester one chances to meet!”

“I am glad,” observed Nora, “that you have become aware of the danger you incur on such occasions.”

“All right,” said Jack.

“All wrong,” cried Nora, impatiently, “but fortunately Seppel is safe from further temptation.”

Jack’s eyes twinkled very knowingly.

“You mean that you can go or send to him,” she said, reproachfully.

“Well, — it would not be a very difficult matter, I should think.”

“Then let me tell you,” she continued, gravely, “that by doing so you will frustrate all my plans for him — that the forester will never, after another offence of this kind, give his consent to his daughter’s marriage with him — and that Rosel, for whom I feel personally

interested, will be made more unhappy and hopeless than ever!"

"I did not say I would do it," he observed, deprecatingly.

"You have said enough to prevent my taking any further steps about the purchase of the mill until after your return to the village; I shall neither go to inspect it to-morrow, nor to visit the alp the day after, nor —"

"Come, come, Nora, I thought you would understand me, without an hour's explanation. I could send or go to the alp, easily enough, and I will even confess that I have a useful friend there; but surely you do not think me capable of trying to persuade your protégé to go out with us after all that has happened? I assure you he is safe as far as I am concerned, and if it be any relief to your mind, I can add that I neither want him nor wish for him. Let me, however, recommend you, in case there should be any talk of wild-hunters in these parts again, to send some one up to the alp, — some one, who, if it were necessary, could bear witness in his favour afterwards. I tell you what, Nora," he added, with a laugh, "persuade Rosel to go — and tell her to promise him, that at a certain hour of the night she will pop her head out of the window of the hut, they call that 'windowing,' here, and, if report may be trusted, your long Seppel has quite as decided a predilection for windowing as for hunting."

Nora could not help smiling at this suggestion, but she held her cousin's hand fast when he attempted to leave her, and said, entreatingly, "Return with me to Almenau, Jack, and give up these wild excursions; they are not reputable, however plausibly you may talk of

them. Mr. Torp is, I think, less repelling in his manner than at first, and I believe I might even venture to speak to him now about you, and request permission —”

“Request nothing for me,” cried Jack, petulantly, “I detest that man, and would not accept a day’s shooting if I had to thank him for it! You see, dear Nora, a woman cannot understand things like a man. I know perfectly well what I am about, and only regret not being able to assist you in the purchase of this mill, but my father will, I daresay, do all that is necessary, and aw — I say, Norry, just look here, will you — don’t you think I am getting a very respectable moustache — I wonder if I shall be obliged to shave it off when I go home?”

He stretched out his face towards her for inspection, in a rather provocative manner, received a light slap on his mouth from her glove, and then, fully persuaded that he had convinced her of the superiority of his sex to hers in general, and of his wisdom to hers in particular, he strode off towards Tyrol, while Nora slowly returned to the sexton’s.

Need it be related how Torp, with enduring patience, awaited the return of his friend to the inn? how he sprang up to meet him, and encountered Jack Nixon?

What he felt when he returned the scarcely perceptible salute of his sullen and purposely uncourteous countryman, may be imagined. Had any one been near him, they might have heard him murmur, as if in answer to some self-made reproach, “How the deuce could I think of him, when every one said he was in Innsbruck!”

CHAPTER XIV.

Woodmen at Work.

TORP was at the mill the next day before Nora; he was fishing in the stream below the house, and, as it appeared, with considerable success; but instead of turning away and pretending not to see her, as he would have done but a week previously, he looked up, accosted her cheerfully, packed up his fishing-rod while speaking, and accompanied her to the mill. Nora was neither pleased nor displeased at the meeting; the day before his presence had been a restraint and a bore, at the mill it was neither. He knew her motives for going there, and after having offered his services instead of Waldemar, she could only attribute his appearance to a wish to be useful, and felt in a manner constrained to receive what she considered an effort of civility on his part with a good grace.

Torp had seldom seen her to greater advantage than during this mill inspection, when, preceded by the miller and followed by Tyrolean Seppel, she visited every nook and corner of the building, listening with unwearied patience and evident intelligence to the long explanations of the machinery and latest improvements given by the latter, in a deep melancholy voice that well accorded with his sombre appearance. Torp was perfectly inattentive; he understood all at a glance, considered the works of rather primitive construction, the fall of water the most valuable part of the property, and by degrees completely concentrated his scrutiny and thoughts on Nora, whose long curved eyelashes, more than powdered with flour, seemed to possess a sort of fascination for him. When well covered both with flour and bran, they

went to the saw-mill, and having there added a considerable quantity of dust to their garments, they entered the house, where Nora sat down with the miller, his wife, and black Seppel at the table in the dwelling-room, and deliberately looked over all the papers and documents offered her, taking notes in a business-like manner that equally amused and surprised Torp. He perceived she did not want him, yet he lingered and listened to the long discussion that followed about clear profits and probable losses, the number of cows kept, the alpine pasture, and the forest rights; his patience was not even exhausted by proposals on her part to buy most of the furniture of the house, as well as the farming utensils and part of the cattle; and though he did not accompany her through the rooms, he followed to the cow-house, and advised her to see the cattle on the alp, and to consult the forester before she decided on the purchase of live stock.

"You think me childishly impatient," she said, walking to the front of the house, "and you are right. I know that my evident desire to purchase will raise the price of everything I have been shown during the last hour, but I cannot conceal my wishes on this occasion, for it so happened that one of my first walks with Rosel in this neighbourhood was to the Craggs, and on our way we stopped for half an hour here, and I remember then hearing her say, that the mill was dearer to her than any place in the world, from its having been the playground of her infancy and early youth; that it was here the children from the Craggs and the forest-house had met after schoolhours; and that she could imagine nothing more delightful than sitting on the rocks below, or the timber ranged in heaps around the saw-mill, and listening

to the rushing and splashing of the water. She appeared almost offended at my observing that the place was rather noisy!"

"It is noisy," said Torp; "but children like noise, and youthful reminiscences are a source of great enjoyment. Rosel has also, perhaps, some pleasant recollections of a later period, when a certain longlegged cuirassier may have taken post on the timber here?"

"Very likely," said Nora, "I believe she did say something to that purport; at all events, that she loves the place is certain, and I trust she may live long and happily in it, and heap up a fresh store of these pleasant recollections for her old age."

"She will have every reason to place your visit to Almenau among them," observed Torp, "and to be grateful in no common degree."

"I exact no gratitude," said Nora; "we have entered into an engagement, which, if kept by her and every future possessor of the mill, will make our obligations mutual."

"You must have been very much attached to Arthur Nixon," he said, as they afterwards walked towards the village together.

"He was one of my nearest relations," she answered, evasively.

"True," said Torp; "but as well as I can remember, he associated wonderfully little with his near relations."

"You knew him — well?" she said, half interrogatively.

"Oh, of course I knew him, for he latterly identified himself completely with his wife's family, and *they* are relations of mine, you know."

"I did *not* know it," said Nora, quietly.

"Ah, true — of course not — how could you? You do not even know *my* name yet, Miss Nixon."

Nora smiled, but without looking up, or appearing to consider the subject worth a question.

Piqued at such unexpected indifference, and perceiving, with infinite mortification, that his own person could not procure him the consideration he now began to desire from her, Torp thought it advisable to take advantage of the present occasion, to at least partly make her acquainted with his position in the world, the advantages of which he had been too long a younger son not fully to appreciate. He began by repeating his last assertion, added in explanation that Waldemar had never been able to pronounce the English "th," and ended with the information that he was a Thorpe, and — very nearly related to the Medway family.

"In fact," said Nora, perfectly unmoved, "you now choose me to know that you *were* the Honourable Charles Thorpe, and are now Earl of Medway. I regret," she added, a little ironically, "I regret that I cannot pretend the astonishment you perhaps expected, but I am an indifferent actress, and have been too long aware of your real name to attach the importance to your communication that it perhaps deserves."

"So Waldemar betrayed me after all!" said Torp, biting his lip, and slightly frowning.

"No," she replied, "he understood too well your wish to remain unknown, in order to escape the probably expected obtrusiveness of our family. My informant was a Prussian lady, and her daughter, to whom you were introduced on the Peissenberg."

"Ah! so long ago!" exclaimed Torp. "Then you knew who I was when those not very flattering remarks

about a certain Charley Thorpe were made in the garden of the inn not long ago."

"Undoubtedly."

"I have to thank you for your forbearance on that occasion," said Torp. "Your family took advantage of my incognito to say some very severe things of me, or rather to me."

"I must defend them from this accusation," said Nora, "by assuring you that they were, and are still, in utter ignorance of your true name."

"Do you mean that you never told them?" he asked, unable to conceal his astonishment.

"Never!" she replied, laughing lightly, but with a zest that annoyed him. "I thought if you chose to eclipse your glory, and play at mystery, it would be ungenerous of me to interfere with your plans, whatever they might be."

Torp felt completely put out of countenance; he thought the eyes of his companion began to sparkle mischievously, as if she rather enjoyed his discomfiture, and a long pause ensued.

"Perhaps," at length he observed, with some pique, "perhaps, Miss Nixon, I should have found more favour in your eyes, if, instead of having been Charles Thorpe, I had had the luck to be a Tom or Dick Torp?"

"Perhaps you might," said Nora, "but even as Mr. Torp, you have contrived to make yourself particularly disagreeable to me — to us all."

"In what way?" he asked, eagerly. "Surely the slight avoidance on my part, that may have been evident at the commencement of our acquaintance, cannot have made so unpleasant an impression on you?"

"It has made none at all," she answered, "for I did not wish it otherwise. But your determination not to allow Count Waldemar or the forester here to give our poor dear Jack a few days' sport, has indeed made a more than unpleasant impression on me! It was scarcely to be expected, that, at his age, he would remain a contented spectator of successes such as yours, and the consequences have been of a nature, that, I confess, I am not likely to forget easily."

"I understand," said Torp, hastily; "I — I am very sorry — I shall speak to the forester about it directly, and —"

"Too late," said Nora, interrupting him; "I do not know where, in Tyrol, John may now be." She hesitated for a moment, and then added, "What is past can be remedied — what may yet occur. —"

"Good heavens, Miss Nixon! surely you will not lay to my charge all that that wild boy may do! Perhaps he is still near St. Hubert's; I will go there to-morrow — this evening, if you desire it — and entreat him to return here."

"He will not do for you what he refused me," said Nora; "but," she added, hastily, "do not misunderstand me, or suppose him in the company of wild hunters. He goes out with some Tyrolean peasants who rent the hunting-ground on the frontiers."

"And who pass them," observed Torp, "whenever they can do it with impunity."

"Jack may do so in ignorance," said Nora; "that is what I fear; and so much, that I shall write to him, and mention your proposal to speak to the forester. I can say you made the offer voluntarily; he forbade my speaking to you on the subject."

"Then you thought of asking me?"

"More than once; for, until yesterday, I feared he was with very reckless companions."

"I still suspect he is not with very steady ones," said Torp.

"At all events," rejoined Nora, "I shall write, and most probably the sexton at St. Hubert's will know where to forward my letter; in the meantime, I must take care to have his companion, long Seppel, strictly watched."

They had reached the inn while speaking, and Nora perceiving the judge in the garden, immediately joined him; and, having renewed her acquaintance, drew her notes from her pocket, and began a conversation, which ended in her knowing what she might offer, and what ultimately give, for the mountain-mill — and a resolution to go the next day to the alp belonging to it.

Great was her surprise when she mentioned her intention, in the course of the evening, to her uncle and Georgina, to find that they were willing to accompany her. They had heard that they could drive to the base of the mountain — that the path, chiefly through a forest, was less steep than usual to such places, and particularly carefully made — being used for the transport of wood in winter. No day could possibly suit them so well as the next; and, in short, they had made up their minds to see a real alp before they left the highlands.

"The Falkners are to return to St. Benedict's tomorrow," said Georgina; "so we cannot well go to the lake — neither do we wish to be in the village when they pass through it."

"At what hour can you start?" asked Nora.

"After breakfast, and post-time."

"That is, ten o'clock," said Nora. "A drive of half an hour will take you to the mountain, — my uncle will require three hours to mount; so that I may suppose you will be on the alp between one and two o'clock: I shall be there long before noon, most probably."

"Why will you not go with us?"

"Because I am going first to St. Hubert's chapel."

"What is to prevent us from visiting the chapel also?" asked Georgina. "I remember your telling me something about its antiquity and carved-wood altars, that rather excited my curiosity."

"Did I?" said Nora, musingly. "The way to the chapel is easy; but thence to the miller's alp would be too much for my uncle, or you either, Georgy. There is no path, and I shall require a guide who knows the country well, and can help me to scramble across the mountain called the 'Rocky Horn.'"

"May I ask what induces you to go either to the chapel, where you were so lately, or over this Rocky Horn, if it be such a pathless wilderness?"

Nora did not choose to tell her that her brother Jack was roughing it in the mountains with Tyrolean peasants, instead of being, as she supposed, at Innsbruck; still less did she feel disposed to enter into an explanation of Torp's recent offer; and her fears that a letter from her would not be sufficient to induce her wilful cousin to return to the village, though she had some reasonable hopes of the result of another conference with him.

"I have long intended to make an excursion over the Rocky Horn," she replied after a pause. "St. Hu-

bert's is the pleasantest, if not the nearest way to it. Then, as Rosel goes with me, I wish to pass the place where the woodmen are felling timber, that she may see a friend of hers who is at work there; and, all things considered, it will be much the same thing to you, I should suppose, if you find me at the alp when you arrive there."

During the evening, Mr. Nixon talked a good deal of his famous ascent of the "Peissenberg mountain," and seemed ready to undertake the Rocky Horn itself, had he received the slightest encouragement from Nora. The necessity of getting up at daybreak for the purpose alone deterred him from making at least the attempt; and he professed himself perfectly satisfied on hearing that the miller's alp was one of the highest in the neighbourhood, and peculiarly interesting, from its being half Tyrolean, near an extensive clearance in the forest, and surrounded by charcoal-burners.

Nora, Rosel, and their guide, left Almenau at a very early hour the next morning, and reached St. Hubert's in good time; but neither the sexton nor his grandson were at home, and the other members of the family could not tell her whether or not the "young gentleman" was still at the inn "on the other side." So Nora decided at once on taking her companions on, and breakfasting with them in Tyrol.

Her first question on reaching the inn was, "Is the foreign gentleman still here?"

"Yes."

"Is he up?"

"Yes; he is drinking coffee and smoking a cigar in the little parlour."

"Bring us coffee there, too; and you, Rosel, go to

the kitchen and see what they have got for Michael's breakfast."

Greatly pleased at finding her plans so successful, Nora moved lightly on to the little parlour, and, uncere- moniously opening the door, exclaimed, "Here I am again, you tiresome, good-for-nothing —" then she stopped, looked round the room, and stammered an excuse to Torp, who stood before her, apparently equally pleased and surprised, and colouring in a manner very unusual to him.

"You need not explain, Miss Nixon," he said, with his accustomed self-possession: "I am perfectly aware who it was you expected to meet. I hoped, by coming here yesterday evening, to have had a better chance; but, it seems, Mr. John Nixon left this place the day after we were at St. Hubert's, and the people here profess complete ignorance of his present place of abode, so that I have not been able to follow him."

"You have been very kind," said Nora; "and I am greatly obliged to you, — but what are we to do now?"

"Write to him," said Torp.

"Of what use, if they don't know where he is?"

"I believe, Miss Nixon, that letters often reach their destination where there is no post, if a request to give the bearer a florin be distinctly written beside the address."

"But," said Nora, "to make it intelligible it must be written in German, and Jack cannot read German writing."

"Then let us put an English translation underneath," suggested Torp.

"Stupid — my not thinking of that," she rejoined, laughing, while she commenced a search for writing-materials.

In an old portfolio some paper was found — then the dried-up ink hastily inundated with water, and, after some time, a pen procured, that enabled her to write a short and urgent note, to which Torp requested permission to add a couple of lines. Before signing his name he looked up, and asked, “Am I Torp, or Medway, Miss Nixon?”

“Torp,” she replied. “You can choose your own time to make yourself known to my family.”

“The name is certainly not euphonious,” he observed, when writing it as signature.

“What’s in a name?” she cried, gaily. “A rose by any other name — you know —”

“No, I do not know any such thing, Miss Nixon, for it seems to me that there is a good deal in a name.”

“Especially in a titled one,” she answered, rather sarcastically, while folding up their joint letter.

“I was not thinking of titles — I — I alluded to the melancholy fact of you and your family having taken a dislike to the *name* of Charles Thorpe; of himself you know too little to form an opinion.” He paused, and then added, “You do not deny it?”

“I cannot,” said Nora.

“You deliberately confess that you disliked without ever having seen me?”

“Yes,” she replied, with a gravity that rather surprised him.

“Is this right? is this just, Miss Nixon?”

“Perhaps not,” she said, rising; “it is rather what you call a ‘melancholy fact.’ I wonder,” she added, musingly, “to whom in this house I ought to confide our letter?”

“To the eldest son of our host,” answered Torp; “I

have very little doubt that he will deliver it both safely and quickly. One word more, Miss Nixon; may I ask if a personal acquaintance with Charles Thorpe has tended to remove this unreasonable antipathy to his name?"

"You seem to have forgotten my having mentioned yesterday that Mr. Torp had contrived to make himself rather disagreeable on more occasions than one."

"Hang Torp," he cried, half laughing.

"I have no objection," said Nora.

"And Charles Thorpe?" he asked.

"Hang him, too, by all means," she answered, walking off with her letter, and leaving him in provoking uncertainty as to the progress he had made in her good opinion.

Perhaps it was a wish to obtain some information on this subject that induced Torp to leave the inn at the same time with Nora and her companions, and accompany them across the mountains. He did not, however, choose her to suppose so, and took the trouble to explain at some length that he had long intended to make this excursion, in order to see how the Bavarian foresters managed their fellings on the mountains. Why he was afterwards half offended with her for believing him implicitly, it would be hard to say, and he actually looked little less than angry when she turned from him to their guide, and requested the latter to give them all the information he had acquired concerning forest-culture and the habits and employments of the woodmen. She knew that Michael had often been employed as feller and logman, and that he was still in the habit of sledging wood in winter, and found, as she had expected, but little solicitation necessary on her part to induce

him to be loquacious on a subject so familiar and interesting to him.

Few people lead a more isolated, monotonous, obscure, and laborious life than these German woodmen, especially in the mountain districts, where their work is frequently performed with more danger than attends the enterprises of the most dauntless chamois-hunters; yet it is in such places that the employment is eagerly sought, and that during the winter months the young peasants leave their homes, when the fields lie buried in snow, and no longer require their care, to seek work for themselves, or their otherwise unemployed horses and oxen. The money so obtained is pure gain, which, with the possibility of returning occasionally to their families, makes them brave their hardships cheerfully. Many even find a sort of fascination in the wild scenery, the sociability of their comrades, and the pride of increased physical strength, so that they are induced ultimately, when they have no prospect of marriage, to become woodmen or charcoal-burners by profession. These men acquire, in the course of a few years, a peculiarly robust and powerful appearance; their shoulders are broad; strong muscles, like lines of whipcord, may be traced beneath the sun-burnt skin of their arms; and no stretch of an English imagination can picture the dimensions of their short, thick, Saturday-clipped beards.

The way from St. Hubert's to the miller's alp led Nora past all the various contrivances for expediting the mountain timber to the valleys; and, while her guide beguiled the way with explanations of the ice-channels, water-courses, sluices, weirs, and sledging-paths, she followed him, unconscious of fatigue, to the summit of the

mountain where Seppel and his companions were at work. They arrived just in time to see the process of felling a pine of no common dimensions that had grown on a sort of promontory on the skirts of the wood, and, in consequence, found means to stretch its wide flat branches outwards, their weight giving the tree an inclination downwards that greatly added to its picturesque appearance. The woodmen scrambled up the crags; two of them laid the large sharp-toothed saw on the trunk, and the bark chipped off around the scarcely perceptible wound; more and more steadily it grated backwards and forwards, and small splinters darted, and yellow dust began to fall at each side; other woodmen advanced with poles, which they pressed against the trunk to direct the fall. The saw reached the middle of the tree, the pith is severed, and a shudder, as of agony, seemed to pass through the quivering branches as they rose and fell with every motion of the saw. More men pressed forward, and stemmed themselves resolutely against the now tottering trunk; a smashing and snapping of the branches among the trees behind, intermingled with the creaking of the trunk itself, warned the sawyers to take flight; the tree bent forward more and more; the branches waved frantically; for a moment it seemed to raise itself by a violent effort, the next fell prostrate, the shouts of human voices lost in the crash that for a few seconds effectually stunned the less inured spectators.

The echoes were hardly silent when the woodmen sprang forward with saws and axes to commence the work of dismemberment. Seppel, who had been one of the sawyers, now approached Rosel, and, after some whispering, the latter asked Nora if she would not like

to see the woodmen's shed, and proposed their resting there until the men came to cook their dinner.

Nora acquiesced willingly, but sent their guide to the miller's alp, with directions to return for her in case her relations should arrive sooner than she expected. It was not until Seppel and Rosel walked on to show the way, and Nora was in a manner left alone with Torp, that she became conscious of his more than usual thoughtfulness and taciturnity, and began to feel some qualms of conscience for having so completely forgotten his presence, and neglected him, after the effort he had made to relieve her anxiety respecting her cousin John. She therefore resolved to be polite and loquacious for the next hour at least, and made the most laudable efforts to appear so, but never had she during her life been less successful. It was in vain she racked her brain for questions or observations likely to interest him. He looked at her intently, but answered so absently, that she at length desisted, and left him to reflections of an apparently but little agreeable nature.

CHAPTER XV.

Quits!

THE woodmen's summer hut was of very primitive construction. Altogether of wood, and very carelessly roofed, it contained but one large room, furnished with sleeping-places for about a dozen men, — a long stone hearth, that served alike for fireplace and table, being provided with rough hewn benches at each side, — and a rack against the wall of planks, on which hung the saucepan and iron cooking spoon of each workman, with the scrip that contained his week's provision.

Seppel's was immediately opened for Nora's inspection, and she found in it the remains of a loaf of brown bread, a small bag of white flour, and a round box made of maple wood, containing "*schmalz*," that is, butter melted to oil, and then cooled, in which state it can be preserved for months without danger of its becoming rancid. This is, in fact, their substitute for meat; but only those who work hard, and in the open air, could venture to live so exclusively on food so butyraceous. The mode of preparing this woodman's fare is simple in the extreme. A portion of flour is mixed with fresh cold water and a little salt, the pan then placed on the fire, with a large slice of *schmalz*, which almost immediately assumes the appearance of oil, in which the dough or paste is turned until completely saturated with grease, and the morsels slightly browned and crusted.

When Seppel had explained all this, and begun to replace his provisions in the bag, Nora turned to Torp, who was standing at the door watching a charcoal-burner, whose kiln was visible in the open space below the hut.

"These people," she said in a low voice, "lead a laborious life, and suffer all sorts of privations."

"Better than working in a coal-mine," he answered; "at least *I* should prefer it."

"Even in winter?" she asked.

"Yes. There is something inspiriting in warring against storm and snow, in places such as this — something pleasant in work so completely manly. The hardships and dangers are not greater than those of our sailors, and possess the advantage of personal freedom of action and motion. Had I been born here, and a

peasant, I should undoubtedly have been either a forester or woodman; and who knows," he added, with a smile, glancing towards their companions, "who knows but I might have found a Rosel, to bestow her love and — a pocket full of cheese upon me."

Nora looked round in time to catch a glimpse of the cheese, just as it was being transferred to the wallet. Some eggs followed, that must have been most troublesome to carry; and when these had been satisfactorily arranged in the butter-box, Seppel took up a barrel, and said he must go to the spring for water, as his comrades would expect to find it, and a fire ready for them, when they left off work. Rosel followed him out of the hut, and Nora, not feeling disposed for a *tête-à-tête* with Torp, joined them, resolved to take the rest of which she began to feel so much in need at the spring. They stopped on their way for a moment to speak to the charcoal-burner, and as Nora then glanced upwards, she perceived Torp, with folded arms, and head bent down, striding backwards and forwards, on the small space before the woodmen's hut, in a manner that rather excited her wonder, but made her suppose he had no intention of following them.

The spring was celebrated for its ice-cold, clear, and sparkling water, and had therefore been covered with a rough building resembling a grotto; some woodman, too, in an idle hour, had formed a spout for the water, so that it flowed fresh, and without exposure to the air, out of the rock into the receptacle beneath, whence it trickled in various small channels down the side of the mountain. There were rustic benches beneath the trees and moss-cushioned rocks beside the fountain; and it was on one of these that Nora seated herself, threw her

hat on the ground, and drew from her pocket a leather drinking cup.

"No need of that, miss," said Seppel. "We have our glass, and whoever breaks must replace it. As good luck would have it, the last time Count Waldemar was out hunting in these parts, with the English gentleman, they smashed it some way or other between them, I suppose, for in the evening we missed it, and the day after found two new glasses here, thick and strong ones you see, and not likely to fall to pieces for a chance knock against the rocks."

While Nora examined the glasses, and tried to guess which had been chosen by Waldemar, Seppel filled his keg with water, and Rosel amused herself gathering some beech leaves, and fastening them ingeniously together with the needle-like foliage of the nearest pine-tree, so as to form a chaplet of such peculiarly classical appearance, that when she encircled Nora's head with it, Torp, who was at the moment approaching them, could hardly repress an exclamation of admiration. Perfectly unconscious of the light decoration, Nora bent forward and filled a glass with water, while Seppel shouldered his keg, and prepared to leave the spring; — perhaps Rosel intended to accompany him, she murmured something about helping to make a fire: but Nora, who had already caught a glimpse of Torp, requested her to wait a few minutes longer, and pointed to a place on the rocks beside her.

"If Waldemar were here, Miss Nixon," observed Torp, as he drew near, "he would say that you looked like the nymph of the fountain."

"And you," answered Nora, "would think that I looked more like a wearied wayfarer resting at a shady spring."

"Be a nymph for the nonce," said Torp, smiling, "and give me a glass of this famous water."

Nora lazily stretched out her arm, let the water flow into and over the glass for a few seconds, and then held it towards him. He would have given much at that moment could he have detected the slightest shade of coquetry in her manner; but with the most provoking unconsciousness of his glance of unconcealed admiration she shook the water from her dripping hand, and then leaned back against the rocks, while deliberately drying her fingers in her handkerchief.

Perhaps Torp wished to rouse her, perhaps he thought of his sister Jane, perhaps he only thought of himself, when he observed, with unusual significance of tone and manner, "I received a letter from Harry Darwin yesterday, Miss Nixon; — he is not yet aware of my having met you and your family here, and addressed his letter to Herrenburg in Tyrol, supposing me to be staying with the Benndorffs."

The colour that had overspread Nora's face at the commencement of this speech faded away, when she perceived that Torp was still ignorant of her being Harry's step-sister.

"I believe he is an old acquaintance — a friend of yours," he continued.

"He scarcely deserves the name of friend," she answered, composedly.

"Yet you knew him long and intimately," persisted Torp.

"Long — but not intimately," she answered.

"You liked him — of course?" he said, half interrogatively.

"Not particularly."

"Yet you received his attentions."

"They were few enough," said Nora, with a look of amusement, perfectly incomprehensible to Torp; "but however I might have valued them at one time of my life, they became in later years perfectly worthless, and at last equally disagreeable and troublesome."

"And," — half soliloquized Torp, while he diligently drew lines in the gravel with the iron point of his mountain staff, — "and Harry fancied — supposed — no matter what!"

"No matter indeed," she rejoined; "he never did anything that could lead to a supposition that he really cared for me, and scrupulously avoided all professions of a regard which he would have been half ashamed to confess for any one bearing the hated name of Nixon! His indifference caused me, however, no unhappiness, for experience has taught me not to waste a thought, still less a particle of affection, on any one, until they have said in the most unequivocal manner, 'I like,' or 'I love you.'"

"Then pray waste, or rather bestow a thought on me now, Miss Nixon," said Torp, "for, from my soul I love you."

"You!" cried Nora, sitting upright, in unfeigned astonishment, and roused as much as he could possibly have expected. "You? — surely you are jesting!"

"By no means. I wish to tell you, as unequivocally as you can desire, that I love you."

Nora was silent: she shaded her eyes with one of her hands, to hide the surprise that at first over-powered every other feeling. Then came a confused recollection of her long-cherished resentment towards the man who now stood beside her, and of her ardent longing for an

opportunity of making him suffer mortification such as he had caused her ten years previously; but, instead of seizing the offered opportunity for revenge with the eagerness that she had expected, she perceived that a more Christian-like feeling had replaced her previous animosity, and before long she found herself considering how she could best explain, that though she no longer *disliked*, she had not yet learned to like him. She looked up at last, and perceived him leaning against the side of the grotto, awaiting her answer with an air of such cool self-command, such calm confidence in the result of her meditations, that her pride instantly took alarm. He had so evidently misunderstood the cause of her silence, that she was provoked with herself for having felt anxious to spare his feelings, and consequently made no effort to conceal her mirth, when he observed, "You are even more astonished than I expected, Miss Nixon; but I hope for an answer nevertheless."

"An answer to what?" she asked, with admirable composure.

"I did not think you could be so malicious," said Torp, good-humouredly. "What I have said can hardly be misunderstood, but if you require time to consider, or wish to consult your family, say so; I can wait."

"I have no doubt of that," replied Nora, smiling archly. "You are a perfect personification of patience at this moment."

Torp knew too much of women to augur well from such complete self-possession on her part; he bit his lip and coloured, as the conviction flashed across his mind that if she accepted him it would be for his coronet and fortune, and not at all for himself.

"I require no time to consider," she continued, "nor

is it necessary for me to consult my family. Let me rather recommend you to forget what you have just said, while reminding you, that, like your brother ten years ago, you are proposing to 'make an egregious fool of yourself.' "

"Perhaps so," answered Torp, "but — I love you!"

"Have you forgotten all your resolutions to avoid 'these people,' as you called us?" continued Nora.

"Have you considered the 'odious connexion?'"

"Yes," he answered, without hesitation, "but — I love you!"

"Has the possibility," said Nora, "just the mere possibility, never occurred to you, that your love might not be returned?"

"I have thought of that too, Miss Nixon, and as Mr. Torp, or even Charles Thorpe, I should hardly have ventured to indulge a hope of a favourable hearing. When I spoke, my reliance was placed quite as much, and now, I regret to say, rests altogether, on what I have to offer with myself, rather than on myself personally."

"I understand you, Lord Medway; but your rank will have quite as little influence on me, as my fortune on you."

"Had fortune been an object to me," said Torp, somewhat loftily, "I should have reserved, if not my heart, certainly the offer of my hand, for the sister of my friend and relation, Harry Darwin."

"You have unconsciously done what you have just said," she rejoined, quietly, "for — I am Harry's sister Leonora."

Torp's start, and but half-suppressed exclamation of surprise, attracted the attention of Rosel, whose presence

had been less heeded than that of a child by either of them. They knew that the girl, with all her intelligence, was to all intents and purposes made deaf and dumb when listening to a language unknown to her; and so low and calm had been the voices of the speakers, so unruffled the manner of both, that she had, until that moment, supposed them to be discussing some topic devoid of all personal interest. She looked up just as Torp was saying, "So you are Leonora — half a Thorpe — and my cousin in spite of yourself. If I had not been impenetrably stupid, I might have guessed it the first day we met! And your dislike to me," he added, seating himself at the opposite side of the fountain — "your dislike to me originated in my interference with Medway's plans ten years ago — of course."

"His plans were unknown to me," replied Nora, "but you may remember that at your instigation I was expelled your mother's house, in a manner that was neither kind nor considerate. Without being consulted, or given the friendly advice to write to my nearer relations, I was forced upon them — sent to an uncle prejudiced against me, not only by my evident wish to ignore him, but still more by a letter from you, representing my at worst thoughtless conduct, in a manner that threw upon me all the opprobrium of a detected intriguante."

"My mother — my sisters —" began Torp, and then stopped, evidently unwilling to excuse himself at their expense.

"I can now understand their anxiety and fears," she continued, "and forgive them and you for wishing to get rid of me. It is the recollection of the way in which I was dismissed, and the discovery of your traducing

letter, which, even after a lapse of ten years, forced tears of indignation from my eyes, that still has power to mortify and pain me."

"You probably found this letter among your uncle's papers?" observed Torp, without looking up.

"Yes."

"And have preserved it as an antidote to any kind feelings you might ever be disposed to entertain for me?"

Nora did not answer; he had made a good guess.

"I had altogether forgotten having written a letter of such offensive purport," he observed, after a pause. "My only consolation is, that by it, or through me, you have become one of the richest heiresses in England. I have, in fact, been the means of procuring you a brilliant lot in life, and greatly promoting your happiness."

"How can you tell?" said Nora, in a low, and rather melancholy voice; "wealth brings with it duties, unknown to, unthought of, by the poor. The responsibility is great, for to whom much is given, from them will much be required: a few thousand pounds would perhaps have made me happier."

"My thoughts were less Christian-like," said Torp dryly; "I alluded to your almost unlimited choice in marriage."

"I do not intend to marry."

He looked up, and smiled incredulously.

"Do not misunderstand me," she continued, quietly; "I have made no rash vows, but I cannot forget that during the best years of my life, among those who loved, or fancied they loved me, not one had resolution, or devotion enough, to overcome the obstacles to a union

with me — not one had the courage to pronounce the word marriage to a penniless orphan. That it is otherwise now, can be attributed to but one motive — and that is not flattering to my self-love.”

“Far be it from me to undertake a defence of the motives of those who may hereafter aspire to the heart and hand you have just refused me,” said Torp; “but if ever a man loved disinterestedly, and was made, by downright earnest devotion, to overlook all obstacles and conquer all his strongest prejudices, I am — I mean I *was* — that man, Leonora, when, believing you to be the daughter of Gilbert Nixon, I proposed to —” he paused, embarrassed by a deep blush that seemed to pass like a shadow over Nora’s face.

“The effort was great, no doubt,” she said, calmly, “and it was unpardonable my not feeling as much flattered as surprised on this occasion.”

“You are severe,” said Torp, “but I have no hesitation in confessing that my struggles between passion and prudence have been great. Had I known who you really were sooner, I should have been spared, if not the pain, certainly the mortification, that I now feel, for nothing would ever have induced me to confess to Leonora the heiress that I loved her.”

“Of that I am quite convinced,” said Nora, “for my brother informed me before he left Munich, that you had already, in a gentlemanly manner, objected to my paternal connexions, and declined my — fortune.”

“So you have heard that too!” cried Torp; “then, indeed, I have nothing more to hope — the letter might have been forgiven — but this offence is, I know, unpardonable.”

“You are mistaken,” said Nora; “though I had the

weakness to feel angry for a few minutes, at having been so carelessly offered, and cavalierly rejected, I soon perceived, that, under the circumstances, you could scarcely have spoken otherwise. I have also not the slightest doubt that had you known me to be Harry's sister, you would not only *not* have acknowledged liking me, but would even have *disliked* me as cordially as —"

"As you do me," said Torp.

"No," she answered; "I believe I can now say that I have ceased to dislike you, and must confess that my ten years' resentment was wrong and unchristian-like. And now, Lord Medway —"

"Don't call me Lord Medway."

"Mr. Torp."

"Nor Mr. Torp, for you, I am henceforward neither."

"Do you not wish to preserve your incognito?"

"To others — yes — but when we are alone I expect you to remember our relationship."

"I have had time to forget it," she rejoined, with some bitterness.

"You have had the same time to forget the offences of Charles Thorpe. Come, Leonora, be indeed a Christian, and tell me you forgive my having prevented you from taking the name of Medway ten years ago."

"That," said Nora, "I can easily forgive, for I never formed any plan of the kind."

"I believe you, but my mother," said Torp, musingly, and as if speaking his thoughts, "my mother said — and says still — that had you remained with her, Medway would have married you."

"It is not improbable," rejoined Nora, "for I will not attempt to deny that rank and fortune might, at that

time, have tempted me in a manner they cannot do now. It was fortunate that she foresaw, and you prevented, so odious a connexion — so terrible a *més-alliance*!”

“You do not understand me,” explained Torp, with heightened colour; “no girl of sixteen could have been a proper match for Medway, who was so notoriously unsteady that our anxiety about him only ended with his life.”

“Ah, you took that into consideration,” said Nora, with pitiless irony; “perhaps also my foreign education, on which you enlarged so eloquently in your letter to my uncle? I now perceive plainly, that all I heard of your intellect and discrimination during my short stay at The Willows was true, and — if then so profoundly calculating and discreet, what must you be now?”

“A patient target for the arrows of your sarcasm,” answered Torp, hiding his intense mortification under an appearance of humility. “But I do not wish you to spare me, or be merciful; on the contrary, the best service you can now render me, is to scoff and laugh at me to your heart’s content. I will even give you fresh subject for mirth, by confessing that poor Medway himself could not have fallen more desperately and irretrievably in love, or become more extravagantly infatuated, than I have been ever since that unlucky evening at the fisherman’s cottage! You see in me, Leonora, a contemptible spoony, whose chief employment of late has been to prowl about by day, in order to catch an occasional glimpse of your grey silk dress, and to wander before the forest-house by night, for the still rarer, and less satisfactory vision, of a shadow passing occasionally across the muslin curtain of a dimly-lighted window!”

What effect this speech produced on Nora, Torp had not time to ascertain, for at that moment he heard his name loudly called.

"Waldemar!" he exclaimed, rising from his lowly seat, "what has brought him here to-day?"

Waldemar, already close to them, was quite prepared to answer this question. He had been out hunting since daybreak, had breakfasted at St. Hubert's, heard there, by chance, of the party about to assemble at the miller's alp, and had crossed the Rocky Horn, in order to return to the village in the exhilarating society of his friend and Mees Nora, if she would permit it!

He sat down deliberately in the place previously occupied by Torp, and while filling a glass with water, and informing the latter that St. Benedict's would soon be the scene of festivities, such as had never been dreamed of within its monastic precincts, his eyes were fixed on Nora, with the thoughtful, studious, keen, yet by no means offensive, artistic stare, that had in a manner become habitual to him. She did not move until the well known sketch-book was drawn from his pocket, and he entreated, "For the sake of all the nymphs that ever guarded fountains, rest on that rock for ten minutes longer, Mees Nora; I would give anything for your head, with that green chaplet, and such wondrous light as we have here at this moment!"

"I cannot sit for my picture just now," she replied, rising, "for by this time my guests are probably waiting for me at the hut." Then throwing the much-admired chaplet on the ground, and taking her hat from Rosel, she placed the latter carelessly on her head, and began a descent to the alp.

Waldemar sprang after her, and Torp was left alone,

beside the fountain. He looked after them as long as they were within sight, then resumed his seat, raised Nora's chaplet from the ground, and, while holding it in his hand, fell into a reverie of the most absorbing description. More than half an hour elapsed before he roused himself, as if from a deep sleep, and perceived that he had unconsciously encircled his wrists with the beech-leaf chain, as if he had intended to try its strength. He smiled somewhat grimly, as the fragile fetter yielded to the first slight movement of his hands; but the force he afterwards employed to fling it far away among the moss-covered rocks above the spring, must have received an impetus from some peculiarly irritating thought, for it was sufficient to have hurled to a much greater distance a stone of no common weight or dimensions.

CHAPTER XVI.

Pastoral Pleasures.

MEANTIME Nora met Michael coming towards the spring, to inform her that "the old gentleman and the young lady were at the alp, and that the miller's daughter was with them, and was making coffee for them." She hurried forward, and found her uncle, a good deal overheated and tired, sitting on the bench outside the hut, while the flounces of Georgina's dress completely filled up the adjacent doorway, which formed a very rustic frame to so fashionable a figure.

"Nora," began Mr. Nixon, "the gravel walk they talked of was not what we expected. Georgy stuck in the mud, and stumbled on the rocks —"

"Oh, never mind Georgy," said Nora; "I was only afraid the excursion would be too much for you. Don't

you think you had better sit inside the hut for a little while, that you may not catch cold?"

"The kitchen smokes," said Mr. Nixon, "and the draught inside is more likely to give a cold than preserve one from it. This is no doubt a very picturesque and pleasant sort of place for people of a poetical turn of mind, Nora, but give me English gravel walks, and English shrubberies, and, above all, an English dairy! The girl there without stockings brought me a roll of butter weighing at least six pounds, and a loaf of bread as black as my boots, to stay my stomach until the coffee was made."

"I am glad you came here of your own accord," said Nora, as she began to unpack Michael's bag of provisions, and placed its contents on the bench beside him. "The enjoyment of excursions of this description is only to be acquired by degrees; and I am afraid you feel the discomforts, without having become conscious of the beauties of scenery that recompense most people for the toil of making their way to such a place as this."

"Well, as to the beauties you talk of," said Mr. Nixon, testily, "I think the higher we got, the less we saw of them. At first we passed some whitewashed cottages, that looked astonishingly clean and comfortable, and with apple and damson trees in the orchards, about them, so overloaded with fruit that the branches were propped up in all directions — very creditable trees indeed — I was surprised to see them. Then we got upon a path covered with large stones — I tell you, Nora — each as big as a man's fist, and so round, that there was no such thing as walking on them without assistance. I took the arm of the fellow you engaged to guide us, and Georgy was right glad to cling to the

millers' daughter — an uncommon handsome girl, that Madeleine Miller, or Miller Madeleine, as they call her, and full of fun, too — had her jokes all the way up the mountain with our man — I couldn't understand a word she said, nor Georgy either — stupid of Georgy, after all the lessons she has had from the captain."

"Very stupid," acquiesced Nora, not in the least knowing what he had said, and thinking only of the knives and forks, that she had just discovered had been forgotten. Waldemar instantly perceived her embarrassment, and suddenly appeared so interested in Mr. Nixon's recital, that the latter turned completely to him, and continued —

"Well, sir, this path brought us along one of your mountain streams — rocks, sir — nothing but rocks and pools of remarkably green water — they say that trout are to be found in them, to the weight of half a pound and more; but I hadn't my rod, that is, the captain's — so we only stopped occasionally to rest. It was an exceedingly wild, uncultivated place, altogether, nothing but stone, and water, and woods without end; I could not help thinking it would be better if the land about here were more cultivated — but I don't venture to give an opinion, as I understand too little of such matters. We manage these things differently in England, however, and I only wish you could hear one of our agriculturists talk!"

"I am sure I should be very happy to do so," answered Waldemar.

"Everything seems to me on so small a scale here," continued Mr. Nixon, waving his hand; "for instance, this dairy here — what's a couple of firkins of butter, and thirty or forty cheese?"

"Very true," said Waldemar, "but it is enough for the miller's family and workmen, and I have even heard that they sell cheese and butter occasionally."

"Now, our farmers —" began Mr. Nixon.

"Excuse me," said Waldemar; "the miller is not a farmer, he is a proprietor, and so are all the peasants about here. They have had the right of pasturage, and been in possession of their land, for upwards of three hundred years."

"Bless me!" cried Mr. Nixon, suddenly struck with respect for the peasant proprietors, "quite what we call old families in England!"

"Quite *respectable*," said Waldemar, laughing, "that is the English word for it, I believe; but they are not what you call rich, quite the contrary, in fact; having only just enough to live upon, and supplying themselves with clothes, and a few luxuries, by the sale of over-plus cattle, butter, or cheese, and in the mountain districts by charcoal-burning and forest work."

"But — aw," said Mr. Nixon, "in England we should have roads through our forests, and here, what they call a wood-path is sometimes like a flight of steps in the rocks, or a mere clearance of trees, where one sinks ankle-deep in mud, or stumbles over projecting roots, or, worse than all, when a road is formed by the trunks of trees laid side by side."

"That is only when there are springs," observed Waldemar.

"That's the reason they were so slippery," cried Mr. Nixon, "and either covered with green and brown slimy plants, or else the bark had peeled off, so that it was almost impossible to walk on them. I am convinced that no horse —"

"No horse ever trod them," said Waldemar; "they are only used for sledging in winter."

Nora left them just as he began an explanation which she foresaw would give him some trouble, as there were no English words for many of the commonest expressions of the foresters. His endeavours to make himself intelligible would have amused her at any other time, but she was not at all disposed to be amused just then, — she wished to be alone, and feared that hours must elapse before she could hope for undisturbed solitude. In the kitchen she found Madeleine jesting and laughing with the two guides, and, less charitably disposed than usual, she condemned her as a heartless coquette, not worthy the commiseration she had felt for her, or the regard of such a man as the forester's son.

Nora was unusually severe in her judgment on this occasion. She was not quite satisfied with herself, consequently, more than usually disposed to find fault with others. The momentary triumph she had felt in showing Torp her indifference to himself, his rank, fortune, and family, had passed away, and given place to the conviction that she never had been, and never would be so devotedly and disinterestedly loved as by him, and that she had thrown away the only and very singular chance that was now ever likely to present itself, of being chosen for herself alone. She had little doubt that she might have refused his proposal, and at the same time have secured him as a friend, and regretted the few bitter ironical words that had perhaps made him her enemy for life.

As soon as Georgina had perceived Waldemar advancing towards the hut with Nora, she had retreated to

the sennerin's little sleeping-room, in order to arrange her hair and dress, for she was one of those women whose anxiety to please, and desire for the admiration of men, is insatiable. Never for one moment did she forget herself, or her appearance, or cease to watch the impression she made on those around her, quite unconscious of the sacrifice of time, thought, and comfort she was making for most thankless observers, and the actual loss of pleasure and perhaps profit, incurred by not bestowing her attention on others. She called Nora, and saw with wonder that her dress was looped up by an india-rubber girdle, so as to display, without reserve, a pair of thick-soled leather boots, made by the village shoemaker; while her straw hat, anything but improved in form by the various rents made in it, and the branches of trees with which it had lately come in contact, was pressed down on her forehead in a manner that proved how little her personal appearance occupied her mind.

"Well, Nora!" she exclaimed, "I never saw such a figure as you have made yourself! I declare if you had not got such a lovely colour from your walk you would not be fit to be looked at. For my part, I'm so excessively tired and heated, and as you see, so dreadfully flushed, that I cannot think of showing myself to Count Waldemar! It is incomprehensible to me what pleasure you can find in trudging through mud, and stumbling over stones to places such as this!"

"A few years hence you will think and speak differently," said Nora.

"Oh, never! I have no objection to these mountains — rather like them, in fact, for scenery — but they should be viewed from their bases or at a distance,"

"Wait until you have resided some time at St. Bene-

dict's," said Nora, "and when I come to see you here you will be as proud of your alps and mountains as I could desire, and will force every one to visit them who visits you."

Georgina shook her head, and began to toss about the clothes of the sennerin, which were placed on a shelf behind the door.

"Why are you crumpling the poor girl's Sunday dress?" asked Nora.

"I am looking for a — a — oh, here it is!" and she pulled forth a few inches square of looking-glass, backed and framed with paper, that appeared to have already been in service on the walls of a room, and having placed it against the window, began to arrange her hair.

"You have completely spoiled the folds of the apron," said Nora, vainly endeavouring to set to rights the humble habiliments.

"No great matter," said Georgina, "if it belong to that creature who looks like a man in petticoats. The boddice lying there beneath the apron would fit a heavy dragoon. Such a waist as that girl's and such feet, I never beheld: it is worth your while to go to the cow-house to look at her, as a matter of curiosity."

"I am going there at all events," said Nora, "as I intend to purchase some of the cows."

"I perceive," continued Georgina, "that Captain Falkner was jesting when he talked of the pleasures of an alpine party."

"Not at all," said Nora, "I am sure he was serious."

"He tried to look so, at all events," rejoined Georgina, "and made me suppose I should see a miniature Swiss chalet, where I have found a smoky cabin — and find a

picturesque, ideal-looking girl in a smart costume, ready to offer glasses of thick cream and pats of fresh butter to everybody — instead of which a female grenadier came to welcome us, and afterwards stalked about with her bare legs, and but very slightly prolonged kilt, carrying a calf as if it were a baby, and slapping and fondling her cows and bulls as if they were children! And then, Nora, this *Ranz des Vaches* — this yoddal or yodel, or whatever they call it — is — is something very trying to the nerves — something between a yell and a screech I think — and perfectly stunning.”

“Captain Falkner will not like to hear you talk in this way,” said Nora, smiling; “remember his father is a Bavarian Highlander, and his mother a Tyrolean.”

“I can’t admire this yodel,” replied Georgina, “and must say the whooping and hallooing of our guide and the miller’s daughter, as we came up the mountain, was perfectly deafening, though they evidently thought they were making themselves particularly agreeable to us.”

“I have no doubt of it,” said Nora, “especially if there were an echo.”

“They were frequently answered,” said Georgina, “and quite distinctly, by people at a great distance, whom we could not see.”

“And you found nothing pleasant — nothing exhilarating in that?”

“Not particularly — the distant shouts were less disagreeable, certainly, and to the echoes I should not have objected, if the piercing sounds that roused them had not had their origin so close to my ears.”

Nora opened the door into the kitchen, and they saw the guides sitting on the side of the hearth, eating brown bread and milk from a yellow earthen pan, placed be-

tween them. As they looked up and exhibited their moustaches, deeply fringed with cream, Nora gravely, in the German fashion, wished them a "good appetite," and was ceremoniously thanked by them in return, before she entered the cow-house, the door into which was open to admit of a conversation being carried on between the miller's daughter and the sennerin.

The cattle had returned to the hut for shade during the heat at noon, and were now lying on the ground ruminating, while a couple of goats trotted about restlessly, and with the familiarity for which they are remarkable, immediately approached Nora, and commenced nibbling the flowers and grasses she had collected with some trouble during her passage over the Rocky Horn. She was unconscious of their depredations, unobservant of the occupation of the sennerin, unheedful of the loud dialogue carried on so close to her, although she stood between the speakers, for she was in thought once more at the spring, and Torp was again telling her how he had wandered about the inn and forest-house, by day and night, and how, in spite of all she could say, he loved her. And she wished that Waldemar had not interrupted them, and that she had had time to remove the unpleasant impression which her last speech must have made on him.

The audacity of the goats at length attracted her attention, for one of them had mounted on some wood piled up near her, and was, with unparalleled impudence, tearing the floral decorations from her hat, so that, in order to put it, and herself, out of reach, she walked through the cowhouse to the entrance used by the cattle, and, having opened the door, began to meditate a visit to one of the other huts. That which belonged to a Ty-

rolean was separated from the miller's by a sort of gap or chasm in the mountain, apparently more wide than deep, for in it the roof of a third chalet was visible. The huts were, however, unusually far apart; and had not Nora had remarkably good sight, she would not have been able to recognise Torp, as he stood at the door of the most distant one, with the sennerin, and moved his arms as if asking the names of the mountains around them — so, at least, she at first supposed; but she soon after came to the conclusion that he had been trying to find out a way to the village which would not oblige him to pass the hut then occupied by her and her relations, for he advanced a short way — stopped — seemed to speak to the woman, who, shading her eyes from the sun with one arm, pointed with the other to the ravine, and a moment after Nora saw him spring down the rocks and disappear.

“He is offended — deeply offended,” she thought, “and not altogether without reason. Yet I do believe I should have had more forbearance, or, at least, been less vindictive, had he not provoked me beyond endurance, by looking so proudly confident. After all, I was not so much to blame, and there is no use in thinking any more about the matter.”

But she did think of it, and of him, so incessantly, that her recollections of what afterwards occurred that day on the alp were never very clear. She remembered that Captain Falkner had joined them, that Georgina's discontent had vanished with marvellous celerity, so that she had laughed and enjoyed everything, especially her father's dismay, when he had been obliged to drink his coffee out of something resembling a slop-basin. She also recollected that her uncle had monopolized Walde-

mar, and, with what he considered British frankness, had informed him that in England people considered most of the German nobility little better than tinkers and tailors, notwithstanding their stunning genealogies, and that, for his part, without boasting, he believed he could say there were few counts or barons that he could not buy "out-and-out."

"Provided they chose to sell," had been Waldemar's reply, and his forbearance had only increased Nora's annoyance.

In short, the events of the day had made an unpleasant impression on her, that remained even after she returned to the village, and induced her to refuse to take any part in the introductions and visiting which immediately commenced between the Falkner and Nixon family.

It was on this evening that the long-expected tombstone arrived from Munich, and was placed in the churchyard to be ready for erection the ensuing day. Mr. Nixon and Georgina had neither time nor inclination to inspect it, — they were sure it was "all right," — were very glad of its arrival, as they would now be at liberty to leave or stay at the village as they pleased, — they hoped Nora would accept the invitation to dine at St. Benedict's the next day — she surely did not intend to spend the whole of it in the churchyard?

Yes; such was Nora's intention, and so absorbing the interest she felt on the occasion, that she did not even turn round, the ensuing day, when the carriage containing Waldemar's family passed, at no great distance, on the road to St. Benedict's. There was also a second carriage, in which she might have seen the friend of her childhood, the Countess Schaumberg; but Nora had no

thoughts just then beyond the marble monument, beside which she had taken her post. Even late in the afternoon, after the workmen had left the churchyard, she lingered at the gate, waiting for the wreath of dahlias and the festoons of ivy that Rosel was to bring her, and with which she intended to decorate the tombstone, for the first time, with her own hands.

And Rosel came, and the wreath was carefully deposited on some sculptured ornaments that seemed to have been made for the purpose, as Arthur had himself observed; the festoons were afterwards arranged, and then they withdrew to a little distance to judge of the effect.

"The tombstone is handsome, but very simple," said Nora, musingly. "Had he not chosen it himself I should hardly have been satisfied with it, although a more ornamented one would perhaps be misplaced in a village churchyard like this."

"That's true," said Rosel, eagerly; "it is the handsomest here, and with the fresh wreath that shall never fail, it will attract everybody's attention, and will show that *he* was honoured who lies beneath the sod, and that his grave is cared for, as the graves of those we have loved in life should be."

The workmen had trampled the grass away, and scattered stones and gravel round the tombstone.

"We must get fresh earth, Rosel," said Nora, "and some plants that will look well on All Saints' Day. I believe I should like a border of those dark-coloured pensées that you have in your garden and some violets — I think — I am sure he must have liked violets."

CHAPTER XVII.

Treats of different Kinds of Love.

NORA waited at the inn to see her uncle and Georgina, on their return from St. Benedict's. "Well, Nora," exclaimed the latter, "who do you suppose Mr. Torp turns out to be? No less a person than Lord Medway! What do you think of that?"

"Nothing," answered Nora, "he told me so himself, the day before yesterday."

"And this tombstone, of course, made you forget all about it! Did he condescend to acknowledge your relationship?"

"After a manner — yes," replied Nora.

"To us he was grandly polite, but had evidently not forgotten our remarks in the garden. He made no inquiries about you, though people spoke both of you and your tombstone, at dinner, as the cause, they called it the fortunate cause, of our coming to, and remaining in the village."

"I suppose you were introduced to the Countess Schaumberg?" said Nora.

"Yes; she came just before dinner, but found time to make a most elaborate toilet. His lordship seemed rather on flirting terms with her, but Captain Falkner told me they are old Vienna acquaintances, and that she is, in fact, attached to Count Waldemar, to whom her husband was related, and who is guardian to her little daughter."

"Did you not think her very beautiful?" asked Nora.

"Not exactly, but she is handsome, and graceful, and dresses well, and is decidedly a very fashionable

personage. Captain Falkner told me she is the best shot at a target, and the keenest sportswoman he ever saw, and I heard her myself talking of duck-shooting to Lord Medway and Count Waldemar."

"And her child?" asked Nora.

"A little fair-haired doll, that speaks better French than German, and shows her affection for Count Waldemar in the most open manner. But I thought, Nora, you would be more anxious to hear of my future relatives than these people."

"Of course I expect to hear all about them too," said Nora.

"The general you have seen," continued Georgina, "he is charming. I like him almost as well as Ernst—that is Captain Falkner, you know."

"No, I did not know it," said Nora, laughing, "but go on."

"Madame de Falkner is rather proud, I suspect; she is related to the Benndorffs, and through them to the Schaumbergs: they are all second or third cousins to each other."

"I consider that scarcely a relationship," observed Nora.

"They think otherwise," said Georgina; "and it was pleasant to see them so intimate and friendly with each other, though it made papa and me feel rather isolated."

"My uncle must have felt so, at all events," said Nora. "How did he contrive to make himself understood by people who probably only spoke French or German?"

"Some of them spoke a little English, and Ernst was very attentive, and acted as interpreter between him and the general for more than an hour. If Lord

Medway had only been a little more civil, or rather a little less haughty, we should have got on famously."

"You surely did not want any notice from him at St. Benedict's!" said Nora.

"Yes, dear, we should have liked it, and he knew it too, for papa spoke to him across the dinner-table, to show at least that he knew something of him and his connexions, and even mentioned that Arthur, whose grave was in the village churchyard, had married into the Medway family. But what was the use of all that, — nobody understood what papa was saying, while they all saw the air of cold civility with which Lord Medway bowed his answers, for he seldom deigned to speak. You know what I mean, Nora?"

"Perfectly. It would have been better if my uncle had taken no notice of him whatever."

"Perhaps so," said Georgina; "but he is evidently a friend of the Benndorffs, and it seems the Falkners have taken an immense fancy to him. I heard Ernst's quiet little sister Charlotte, calling him 'Ce charmant milord;' and, oh Nora, if you had only seen him beside the Countess Schaumberg, looking so very *distingué* and handsome, and evidently liked by every one but ourselves, you would have regretted, as we did, having neglected the opportunity of making his acquaintance when he was supposed to be only a Mr. Torp."

"I don't think I should," said Nora, "nor need you. He showed us too plainly that he did not want to know us; his manners remain the same, and the change is only in you and my uncle."

"Perhaps you are right," said Georgina, thoughtfully. "Count Waldemar was such a contrast!"

"He always has been," rejoined Nora.

"I wish he was not likely to be married to that Countess Schaumberg."

"Why so?"

"Because I think he has rather a fancy for you. The description he gave of your appearance, as you sat beside some spring, near the miller's alp, was quite romantic, and attracted the attention of the countess, though Lord Medway was speaking to her, and looking at her in a way of which your acquaintance with him cannot enable you to form the slightest idea."

"And a — I daresay he was not particularly pleased at the interruption," observed Nora, wishing to hear more, but unwilling to ask in direct terms.

"I should have thought him downrightly angry, he grew so suddenly red, and afterwards so pale," she answered; "but I must have been mistaken, for when Count Waldemar appealed to him for corroboration of what he had said, he declared you were charming at all times, and in all places — at a spring or on an alp, in a wood or on a cart, but most of all when dressed as a peasant after having been exposed for hours to any quantity of hail or rain that could be imagined! The countess understood him better than I did, and said she had heard of all that from Waldemar. I think someway she supposes you my sister, and Lord Medway did not take the trouble, or did not choose to explain — probably fearing the necessity of acknowledging a connexion with our family. I wonder what he will do when you appear with us to-morrow at St. Benedict's?"

"I don't mean to go."

"You must, for my betrothal is to take place, and we are to see Mademoiselle de Falkner's trousseau, and there is to be a ball in the evening, to which all the

people in the neighbourhood have been invited a week ago."

"These gaieties," observed Nora, "will scarcely give you time to become acquainted with your future sister-in-law."

"Time and opportunity enough when we have joined our regiment," answered Georgina, laughing. "The most important thing to be considered now in our dress: she has asked me to be bridesmaid, and I intend to wear white with blue flowers and ribbons; white and blue are the Bavarian colours, you know — so I shall be quite national. But that is for the wedding, which is to take place the day after to-morrow; at the ball, I think I shall appear in rose colour — it becomes me, and looks well at night. I hope you intend to lay aside your eternal half-mourning on this occasion."

"Ask Mrs. Nesbitt what she has got for me," answered Nora; "when I call here on my way into the town to-morrow morning, you can let me know the result of your consultation."

"And what on earth takes you into the town to-morrow to tire and heat yourself, when you have a dinner and ball in prospect?"

"I wish to complete the purchase of the mill, and have a deed of gift drawn up, so that I can bestow it on Rosel whenever you and my uncle wish to leave the village. I have no excuse for detaining you here any longer."

"We shall now have to request you to remain here on our account," said Georgina; "but only until Captain Falkner's leave expires. He goes with us to Vienna, thence to his regiment, in order to give me time to collect one of these extensive German trousseaus, and then —"

"And then," said Nora, "you will ask *me* to be bridesmaid."

"I suppose so," answered Georgina, smiling; "and you will be the only one, if that tend to increase the honour and glory. Had Captain Falkner had time to come to England, we could have been married in good style, with bridesmaids and breakfast, — whereas, now —"

"Now," said Nora, "you will be married in a quiet, unostentatious sort of way, that I should think infinitely preferable."

"There are some people at home I should have liked to have invited," said Georgina, pensively; "and a tour on the continent would have been pleasanter than joining a regiment in country quarters, where one's new dresses are superfluous."

"Ah! I had forgotten to take the dresses into consideration," said Nora.

"I have taken everything into consideration," continued Georgina; "and shall even avoid all unnecessary delay at Vienna for the purpose of — Can you guess?"

"No."

"For the purpose of being married before your brother."

"Georgina! Is it possible that anger or pique has in any way influenced —"

"Oh, not at all," said Georgina, interrupting her; "but I confess that I wish to be married before he is; and rejoice to think we shall not meet for years — if ever!"

"You must have had an odd kind of regard for him," observed Nora, musingly.

"Rather say a very common kind," rejoined Georgina.

"It was made up of personal admiration, vanity, ambition, and interest; and would have borne test as well as that of Lady Jane's, which is probably of the same nature, with this difference — that I was more grateful for his notice, and more flattered by his preference, than she can possibly be."

"It seems to me," said Nora, "as if, even ten years ago, Lady Medway intended to make him her son-in-law in the course of time. He was evidently considered one of the family, — his picture hung up with those of her own children; and, even at The Willows, there was Harry's room, and Harry's cab, and Harry's wherry! They made me for some time suppose him a very important person."

"He has been so to me for many years," said Georgina; "but you need not tell him so, Nora, — there is no necessity for making him vainer than he is, — he would be capable of supposing I married Captain Falkner in a fit of despair; whereas, I am merely glad that he will read of my marriage in the newspaper before his own takes place — he said Christmas to you, did he not?"

"I believe so," answered Nora, putting on her hat, as she perceived, from the window, that the forester and his son were standing at the garden-gate, waiting to accompany her to the forest-house. "I believe so; but I should think it matters little to you now who or when he marries."

As Nora stood with Rosel on the balcony of the forest-house that night, she was unusually silent, and looked so intently upwards towards the stars, that the latter, for some time, supposed her to be praying, and forbore to interrupt her. It was not until the glistening,

dark eyes began to wander along the stream, and towards the road, that Rosel approached, and said, timidly, "Miss Nora, I have a request to make — a great favour to ask of you."

"What is it, Rosel? You are not likely to ask anything that I ought to refuse."

"It is hard, very hard, to explain. I am afraid you will think me presumptuous, — I — I cannot — dare not — say it."

"Then I have made you fear, more than like me."

"No, no, — I do not fear you — I only fear you will think it unseemly in me, taking it quite for granted that you will put me in possession of the mountain-mill."

"By no means, Rosel. I am to see the judge, by appointment, to-morrow, and shall only, as you requested me, delay the gift until you have performed your vow in the chapel of St. Hubert's. If you wish to be in possession sooner, you have but to say so."

"On no account, dear Miss Nora — on no account," cried Rosel, eagerly; "nothing was further from my thoughts than that — I meant quite the contrary."

"You must speak more intelligibly, Rosel, if you expect me to understand you."

"I will — I will tell you everything, Miss Nora: my father said yesterday, that the — the wild hunters had been out again."

"When? where?" cried Nora, anxiously.

"On the frontiers — not far from the miller's alp."

"And your father? —" said Nora.

"Was out last night, Miss Nora; but they had gone back into Tyrol. He came home by the alp to see if Seppel were there."

"And found him at work, I hope?"

"Yes, — but he said, if it had been a Saturday, and Seppel free, he would not easily have been persuaded that he had not been out for an hour or so. Now, Miss Nora, the wild hunters *may* cross the frontiers of a Saturday or Sunday night, and Seppel *may* be again suspected."

"That is," said Nora, "you cannot quite trust him, and think he may be led into temptation where he now is."

"Not so," cried Rosel; "he was not on the wild alp that unlucky morning."

Nora drummed a little on the balustrade of the balcony.

"He was *not*," persisted Rosel, "he swore he was not, and I believe him; neither will he join them now. But we have seen the consequences of his being suspected and not being able to clear himself; and that may happen again while he is going to or coming from the forest. I heard my father say, that if I were once in possession of the mill, and Seppel got into trouble again, he'd refuse his consent to our marriage; and he'd do it, Miss Nora, so great is his hatred of a wildschütz — he'd do it, if he were on his deathbed, and refuse his blessing, too, if I did not promise to give up Seppel for ever — and what would the mill be to me without *him*? Oh, Miss Nora," she added, passionately, "give the mill to Seppel — put him in possession, and you will indeed secure our happiness."

"I understand you," said Nora; "you think your father less likely to entertain suspicions of Seppel the miller, than Seppel the wood-cleaver, and perhaps you are right — it is the way of the world; but it is not

worldly-wise of you, Rosel, to resign everything to a man who is, as yet, nothing to you."

"Nothing to me!" exclaimed Rosel, "he is everything to me, and will not all that is his be mine?"

"It ought to be," said Nora, "especially every bit of his heart."

"Has been mine time out of mind," cried Rosel, confidently. "Dear Miss Nora, I see you understand me, and will grant my request."

"Of course," answered Nora, "I shall do what you tell me will best secure your happiness."

"And," continued Rosel, "all this may as well remain a secret between us, until we have been to the chapel at St. Hubert's."

"As you please."

"My father might be angry with me, if he knew —" began Rosel.

"Very possibly," said Nora, "but he cannot dictate to me, and I shall do — what you wish."

"Thank you, oh, thank you," cried Rosel. "Be assured that I shall never cease to pray for you, night and morning, as long as I live!"

"Do so," said Nora, extending her hand, "and begin at once. Good night!"

How implicitly she trusts him — how thoroughly she identifies her welfare with his, thought Nora. This is love, genuine love, and not a compound of admiration, vanity, and interest, such as Georgina described. I wish I were quite convinced that this Seppel were worthy of her; but, after all, if she think him so, and continue as blind to his failings as hitherto, it is pretty much the same thing as far as she is concerned. I am not even quite sure that she does not like his very faults; she

certainly does not love him less for having been a wild fellow, and a wild hunter.

Nora entered her room, lit a candle, sat down beside the deal table on which she had placed it, and, drawing from her pocket the green leather note-book already mentioned, took from it Charles Thorpe's letter to her uncle, and was soon completely absorbed in its perusal, and the thoughts which it suggested.

And Torp — fortunately we are not obliged to follow the course of his thoughts, after he left the spring. He loved like an Englishman, that is, earnestly and passionately; but being a strong-minded man, and proud withal, he had probably resolved to conquer an attachment so apparently hopeless. To judge by his actions, he considered stalking up and down his room the greater part of the night as the most efficacious mode of putting his intentions into practice. Waldemar had slept too soundly, after his long walk across the mountains, to observe his friend's intranquillity the first night of his return to the village, but on the second this was no longer the case; he had lounged about St. Benedict's during the morning, had joined the family dinner-party, rowed the Countess Schaumberg on the lake afterwards, and smoked a cigar by moonlight with Torp. "All occupations," as he observed to his restless companion, when throwing open the door of communication between their rooms, "by no means calculated to make a man sleepy, therefore, if not disposed to rest, we may as well enjoy each other's society;" and then, with exaggerated politeness, he requested him to prolong his walk to the length of both rooms.

Torp complied, but his steady step shook the room, and incommoded Waldemar, who, having turned over

the leaves of his long-neglected portfolio, seemed now disposed, by the light of all the candles he could find, to add a new sketch to his collection. He looked up imploringly, then impatiently, and at last exclaimed, "I wish you'd be quiet, Torp, and sit down beside me, as you used to do. Look here, I've been sketching something that, after what you said to-day at dinner, you will like to see, or I'm much mistaken."

He *was* mistaken. The sketch was Nora at the fountain, and Torp did not at all like to see it. "Now," he added, after a long pause, "when I have washed in a little colour to-morrow morning, I should like to know what you would give for this?"

"Nothing," said Torp. "I would not accept it if you offered it to me."

"You don't think it like?" cried Waldemar, throwing down his pencil, and holding the drawing at arm's length; "but wait until morning, and you will see it will be as good as any of the other sketches I have made of her, and they are not a few."

"It is already a good likeness," said Torp, "but I should prefer one of your landscapes, if you are disposed to be generous."

"No," replied Waldemar; "I still hope to be able to sell them to Mees Nora for a cup of coffee, though you must perceive I am rather avoiding her, according to your advice."

"I have not perceived any avoidance on your part," said Torp.

"What else do you call my leaving the village as I did, three weeks ago?"

"I call it going home when you were expected to do

so, in order to meet a person to whom you have been all but engaged for nearly two years."

"Yes, but, my dear fellow, there is a great difference between all but, and actually engaged. I consider myself, to a certain extent, still free."

"I don't think you do, Waldemar."

"Quite as much as your cousin Darwin, who, at the end of six years, deserted this charming Mees Nora, in order to marry your, no doubt equally charming sister, Lady Jane."

"Stay," cried Torp; "I must now inform you that my suppositions about *this* Miss Nixon were erroneous. It was the other one, Georgina I believe is her name, who was Harry's flame."

"I don't believe that," said Waldemar, laughing, "Darwin has better taste."

"You will believe it, when I tell you that Nora, or, as we call her in our family, Leonora, is Harry's step-sister — you know his mother married again."

"Not I! I know nothing about these Nixons but what you have been pleased to tell me," said Waldemar, turning to Torp with a look of inquiry; and the latter then explained at some length, ending with the information that Nora had inherited an unusually large fortune from an uncle about a year previously.

"May I ask when and where you first discovered your relationship to this young lady?" asked Waldemar, fixing his keen eyes on the face of his companion.

"Then, and there," answered Torp, placing his hand on the drawing that lay on the table between them.

"Upright as usual, Torp," said Waldemar, leaning back in his chair, and smiling. "I did you injustice for half a minute, and thought you had deceived me

purposely on this occasion (all for my good, of course), but if you had I should never have forgiven you! Perhaps I ought also to confess, that when at home, it more than once flashed across my mind that you had wished to get rid of me, in order to have leisure to carry on a quiet flirtation with Mees Nora yourself! Now don't grow red, or be angry, the thought was natural enough, when I considered you were not the sort of man to pass nearly a month alone in a village of this kind, without some especial interest or occupation, and to my certain knowledge you had, during the whole time, only once been on the mountain with your rifle, and had had but little sport with your angle."

"Waldemar," said Torp, rising, "you wronged me by such a thought, for I advised you to avoid this temptation from pure friendship, and wish most sincerely I had gone with you, as you proposed, to Herrenburg. I remained here in the most perfect state of imaginary security at first, then had to struggle hard with what I considered a mere passing fancy for this wayward girl, and finally yielded to a passion that more resembled infatuation than any thing else. In short, I have been guilty of every imaginable absurdity."

"Am I to understand, that supposing her the daughter of this Gilbert, you —" Waldemar's open eyes and mouth finished the question.

"Understand that I have done everything that is rash and inconsistent."

"And is it possible, that, knowing who you were, she actually —?"

"Actually refused and laughed at me," said Torp, "and I am glad she laughed, for otherwise I might have been tempted to try and make her like me; whereas now,

I shall just remain here long enough to convince her that I can live without her, and then she may bestow herself and her fortune on whomsoever she pleases."

"Oh, that's the way of it — is it?" said Waldemar, first glancing at the flushed countenance of his friend, and then bending over his drawing.

Torp strode up and down the room with folded arms, until a succession of odd sounds made him suddenly stop before his companion. Waldemar was convulsed with suppressed laughter.

"It's a capital joke, isn't it?" said Torp, grimly.

"My dear fellow," cried Waldemar, vainly endeavouring to regain his composure; "I beg your pardon a thousand times, but really the idea of *your* falling into love in this way is so irresistibly comical, that I cannot behave as I ought on the occasion. You have so long been an oracle to me — to all of us poor soft-hearted mortals — that I could as easily have imagined a priestess of Apollo, fresh from her tripod, dancing a polka or mazurka, as you —"

"Pshaw!" cried Torp, striding indignantly to the door of his room.

"I say, Torp — don't be angry — upon my life I'm sorry you've come to grief in this way."

"I am sorry I told you anything about it," said Torp. "It was an unnecessary anxiety to convince you of my probity, and a wish to show you the danger you had escaped, that induced me to make so humiliating a confession."

"I see," replied Waldemar, "I ought to have thanked you for the good advice you gave me, and wisely drawn the conclusion, that where you had become a fool, I should have proved a madman; where you were

laughed at, I should have been — whatever is worse on an occasion of this kind.”

“There is nothing worse,” muttered Torp.

“Then let me tell you, Torp, that I should *not* be laughed at by Mees Nora. She knows perfectly well how much I like and admire her, for I never attempted any concealment, and she would believe me serious, and answer me seriously, if I told her so to-morrow. Now, you commenced by treating her and her relations with hauteur, — then, I can imagine you absolutely odious during what you call your state of perfect security — how you got on when struggling, you know best; you are a strong man, Torp, and I should think your kicks and cuffs may have hurt more than you suppose; finally, by your own account, you became infatuated, and I am sure you must have been when, under such circumstances, you expected your fair countrywoman to be anything but astonished or amused at hearing you talk of love.”

“I was aware of all this,” said Torp, “and therefore told her that I relied more on what I had to offer with myself, than —”

“Soh!” cried Waldemar, interrupting him, “you were explicit and rational too! She must be very good-tempered to have laughed instead of being angry. I think I see you, Torp, grandly informing her, that notwithstanding her connexions and so forth, you condescended to like her — and would marry her; that though you had not taken any trouble to gain her affections, you had no doubt she would accept you, because you were a ‘lord,’ and so forth. Now these things may be understood, but ought never to be expressed, or even hinted — and I am sure, quite sure, your looks were

still more arrogant than your words. Oh, Charley, Charley, if you cannot learn to be humble for a while, at least, you must give up all thoughts of the adorable Nora!"

"I have already done so," said Torp; "neither she nor you shall ever have cause to laugh at me again — and now — good-night."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A Huntress with two Strings to her Bow.

INTIMATE as Nora had been with Irene Schaumberg ten years previously, she was too well aware of the changes which a separation of such length, at their ages, was likely to produce in the feelings — and the alterations which time must naturally have made in her own person — to expect either a joyful or instantaneous recognition, on the part of her friend. To claim acquaintance, and afterwards have to enter into explanations in the presence of Torp and Waldemar, would not be agreeable, therefore she had deemed it expedient to write, and prepare the companion of her childhood for the meeting which was to take place that day, before dinner, at St. Benedict's.

Georgina was particularly anxious to see what effect Nora's appearance would have on Torp. She supposed he would feel himself compelled, at least, in *her* favour, to relax somewhat in his dignity. Great was, therefore, her indignation, when she perceived, that after a cold formal bow, he seemed to lose all consciousness of their presence, apparently as determined to decline relationship as acquaintance with any of them.

The presentations to the Falkners and Benndorffs

had scarcely been gone through by Nora, when the sound of rustling silk became audible, and through the open door of an adjoining room a fair-haired, graceful woman, magnificently dressed, came forward, and advancing directly towards her, encircled her with the whitest and most profusely braceleted arms imaginable, while lightly kissing her on each cheek, she murmured, "*Chère Nora — quel plaisir.*"

"Nora!" cried a young officer, who was present; "our Nora?"

Nora extended her hand to him with a smile, as she said, "I am very glad to see you, though I have not the least idea whether you are Otto, who used to torment me, or Adolph who quarrelled, or Ferdinand who learned to dance with me."

"I am happy to say that I am the last named, and hope this evening to prove that I have not forgotten the instruction we received together, so many years ago."

"I have almost forgotten how to dance," said Nora, "for I have not been at a ball these ten years."

"Ah," said Irene, "that is the reason you look so well and so young, Nora. Nothing is so injurious to the appearance as heated ball-rooms and late hours."

This little scene, and the explanations which it caused, gave animation to the conversation, until they went to dinner. Waldemar had not yet made his appearance, but some manœuvring on the part of the elders of the family, kept a place beside Irene vacant for him, and Nora thought she perceived a slight degree of annoyance, or unwillingness on his part, as he some time afterwards took possession of it.

"You see, Waldemar," said Irene, with a gay smile,

"you see the consequences of want of punctuality. Your father has condemned you to sit beside me for the next hour, as a punishment; but after all," she added, as he drew his chair to the table, "it is better than being put in the corner, you know."

Waldemar murmured something about its being a vast deal better, hoped all his misdemeanours might be punished in the same way, and then leaned back to give directions to a servant about some soup.

"Waldemar, you shall have some venison presently," cried his father, eagerly; "a fair hand killed it for you."

"If you mean my hand," said Irene, "I am afraid I must confess I never thought less of your son than on the day of our last hunt at Herrenburg. By-the-by, I forget why you were not with us," she added, turning to Waldemar; "something about a wildschütz, was it not?"

"No," he replied; "the wildschütz affair was ages ago. I went to St. Hubert's that day, hoping to meet Torp, and followed him to the miller's alp."

"Miller alp? Is not that the place where General Falkner promised me a hunt?"

"More likely in the neighbourhood of the Wild Alp," answered Waldemar. "I dare say our good old forester, or his son, has something in store for us, if that long-legged fellow, who took Torp prisoner, does not get the start of us."

"You mean the famous wildschütz?"

"Yes."

"I hear he has been out again," observed General Falkner.

Nora's conversation with Count Ferdinand suddenly ceased, and she looked up eagerly.

"He was out on the frontiers," continued the general, "and the forester went to look after him, not in the best temper imaginable, as you may suppose. He could not, however, find a trace either of him or his companions, though he visited all his charcoal-burners and woodmen, suspecting one of them of conniving, if not of being a party concerned."

"But he found nothing to confirm his suspicions?" interposed Nora.

"Nothing; nor in the alp huts either, though that is scarcely to be wondered at, as the *sennerins* seldom betray a *wildschütz*. As soon as our festivities are over," he added, turning to the countess, "you shall have the promised hunt; in the mean time, I can offer you some duck-shooting at the marsh beyond the lake. A couple of men were sent up there to-day, and they have erected a fir-tree shed for you."

"And Waldemar," said old Count Benndorff, "I have promised the general that you will take the place of his son while we remain here. Ernst cannot leave his fair fiancée, so the duty and pleasure of accompanying Irene falls to your lot, and very much flattered you ought to be, if she accept you for her companion."

"Of course I feel immensely flattered," said Waldemar, bending over his plate.

"You look more bored than flattered," said Irene, laughing; "but the fact is, if the general has taken the trouble to make arrangements for me, I feel bound to go out duck-shooting, and this very evening too. It is, however, the last time I shall put your patience to the proof, so you need not look so disconsolate."

Waldemar had just begun to protest and explain, when a remarkably pretty little girl, of about seven

years old, came bounding into the room; she seemed alarmed at seeing so many strangers, and pushed herself shyly between him and Irene, placing her hand on the arm of the latter.

"What does this mean?" asked her mother, pushing back the profusion of blonde ringlets that concealed the face of the child; "have you nothing to say to Waldemar, now that he is beside you, though you never cease talking of him when he is absent."

The little girl held out her hand to Waldemar, but did not speak.

"We are only modest before company," he said, drawing her towards him; "no one knows that we have been playing at hide and seek in the cloisters instead of dressing for dinner."

"Ah, soh!" ejaculated the old count, with evident satisfaction.

"And pray, mademoiselle, who gave you leave to make your appearance so early?" asked her mother.

"Waldemar told me I might come whenever I liked," she replied, in French, which, like all children in her rank of life in Germany, she spoke infinitely better than German.

And immediately every one present began to speak in the same language, excepting Mr. Nixon and Madame de Falkner, the latter having undertaken to speak English with him. It was a curious conversation that they carried on together; both spoke, but without being able to make themselves intelligible to each other; however, they laughed a good deal, and Mr. Nixon evidently thought that anything was better than nothing, for, even after they had entered the adjoining room to drink coffee he followed her, and Nora heard him vainly endeavour-

ing to explain how odd it appeared to him dining so early, seven or eight o'clock in the evening being the usual hour in England.

"Yees," replied Madame de Falkner, "we shall dance on zee ball at that time."

Irene tapped Nora on the shoulder. "You must come to my room for a couple of hours," she said, caressingly, "I want to have a talk of old times with you."

Nora followed her through a long suite of large and lofty rooms to the one she had so much admired on her first visit to the monastery. Several persons, in felt shoes, were polishing the floor, already so slippery that it was more adapted for dancing than walking. The gardener was decorating the marble fountain at the end with all the treasures of his not very extensive greenhouse, but they were tastefully arranged and already spread a delicious perfume around.

"Perhaps you would like to look at Charlotte's trousseau," said Irene, opening the door of an adjoining apartment, where they were soon joined by almost the whole dinner party, and where Mr. Nixon, at first innocently supposing himself at a sort of small fancy fair, got up for some charitable purpose, looked round him in dismay at the heaps of linen and dozens of articles of dress which were arranged with taste on tables placed against the wall, seeking in vain those useless little nothings for which elderly gentlemen are expected to give their sovereigns.

Georgina relieved his mind by an explanation, but alarmed him again by the information that she must have a trousseau of precisely the same description.

"Bless my soul, Georgy," he exclaimed, "you don't

expect me to give you table-cloths, and pillow-cases, when you are marrying into such a family as this, and Captain Falkner the eldest son, too."

Georgina said she believed it was expected that she should provide house-linen for the rest of her life. Some one had told her that quite old people went on using the things they had received for their trousseau, and surely if Madame de Falkner thought it necessary to give all these things to her daughter, who was going to marry a Count Benndorff, he could not do less for her, and she had already asked for a list of everything in the room."

"I tell you what, Georgy," cried Mr. Nixon, "I don't understand these things, so I'll give you a silver tea service and a reasonable sum of money, and if you choose to buy linen instead of lace, that's your affair not mine."

"Oh, Nora, did you ever hear anything so shabby?" said Georgina.

"Never mind," answered Nora, "we shall have a German trousseau all the same, — it is a very good rational old custom, well worthy of imitation, even to the tying up of the parcels with coloured ribbon, and the putting labels on them to prevent confusion. Look here, 'Table-cloth for twelve — napkins to match — Turtle-dove pattern!'"

"Come, Nora," said Irene, "examine these handkerchiefs, and then let us go. Do you remember assisting me to hem some of mine, ten years ago, when I was a fiancée, and my solemnly promising to do the same for you when you should be in the same — predicament?"

They had reached the door, beside which Torp was

standing an amused spectator of the scene before him, and especially enjoying the pranks of Waldemar, who had paraded the room with two or three parasols, tried on the shawls, caps, and bonnets, and was now standing as if transfixed in admiration of the bridal wreath, which he held daintily on the outspread fingers of both hands.

"By-the-by, Nora," continued Irene, "for all I know you may be a fiancée now — in fact, I am sure you must be, for how else could Ernst Falkner have chosen your cousin instead of you! There is some mystery here, don't you think so, Monsieur Torp, — *je veux dire* Milor Medvie?"

"The mystery is easily explained," he answered; "Falkner had daily opportunities of seeing one Miss Nixon, while the other found occupation elsewhere."

"Ah, true, Nora made excursions on the mountains, and into Tyrol, — I remember seeing you together in very becoming masquerade dresses."

"Count Waldemar can tell you," said Nora, quickly, "that mere accident brought us together on that occasion, and it was a matter of necessity our wearing the dresses of which you speak."

"Oh, Waldemar!" cried Irene, looking up and laughing, and as Nora followed the direction of her eyes she perceived that he had raised his little ward sufficiently high to admit of her dropping the wreath of orange flowers and myrtle upon Torp's broad forehead, where it lay without a movement on his part to remove it.

Nora walked on — Irene soon followed, observing, as they mounted the stairs together, "If the characters of those two men were mixed we should have something very near perfection. There are times when I scarcely know which I like best."

Pleasant were the reminiscences of their youth — endless Nora's inquiries about their mutual acquaintances. It was when speaking of them that she slowly and unwillingly began to discover the changes which time, prosperity, and constant intercourse with the world of fashion had made in the mind and manners of her friend. The innocent, warm-hearted, unaffected girl, had become what she herself called a "*grande dame*." She spoke without the slightest reserve, and with hardly concealed exultation, of her brilliant position in the world; and so great was her egotism, so desirous was she to expatiate on the delights of Vienna and its society, that she scarcely listened to the short account which Nora gave of her quiet life in London. That she considered herself a person of immense importance was evident; and Nora doubted not that this was the case in the circle in which she moved, for she possessed in no common degree all the advantages there most highly valued — rank, riches, and personal beauty.

Yet, charmed by her graceful manners and fluent conversation, it was long before Nora admitted the perfect worldliness and selfishness of her companion, and, flattered by her unreserved confidence, still longer before she obtained a complete consciousness of her overweening self-esteem and vanity. The whole afternoon passed away in gay descriptions of her success in society during her husband's lifetime — of the manner in which she had punished people who had dared to brave her despotism — and of the heart-aches she had caused! Evening was drawing near when she began to speak of the more interesting period of her widowhood, and it was then that her communications first inspired Nora with profound interest, for Torp and Waldemar assumed

prominent places in the narrative. She had known and liked them for many years. Old Count Benndorff had been her husband's uncle and guardian — Waldemar, his cousin, had frequently spent the winter with them in Vienna. "In fact, so intimate were we," she said, with a light laugh, "that I really could not at first quite comprehend why he might not continue to come to my house and stay there as he had previously done, and was very angry at the reports which were so soon circulated of our mutual attachment and probable engagement. In the course of time, however, they were not altogether without foundation. Waldemar, you must know, is an unexceptionable *parti*, and, had I wished it, there is no doubt that we should soon have been affianced, for his heart is always on his lips and in his eyes, but — but — Nora, if I go on you must promise never to betray me."

"I don't suppose I shall ever have an opportunity," said Nora.

"Probably not — still you must promise."

"I think you had better not tell me — I believe I should rather not hear —" began Nora.

"It would be a great relief to speak to some one," rejoined Irene, "and you could give me information which I much want."

"Go on, then," said Nora, "I promise to keep your secret."

"Fancy, my dear girl, my discovering that I loved some one else in the most absurd and unaccountable manner, and who do you think was this person?"

Nora paused for a moment before she answered, "From all you have said just now, I must suppose you refer to Lord Medway."

"Exactly! — but, my dear creature, he was not Lord Medvie then — he was Monsieur Torp — what you call younger son — *cadet de famille* — poor, everything that was exceptionable, and the contrary to Waldemar — so I — I resolved to overcome the foolish fancy."

"And he?" asked Nora.

"He knew nothing about the matter. I was aware that he admired and liked me, for he said so unreservedly, and often enough. We have always been the best friends imaginable, but nothing more — as yet."

"So —" said Nora, with some surprise, "he — he did not —"

"No, perhaps never thought of me, yet, strange to say, I liked him all the better for his stoicism. It would have been a glorious conquest, and I longed to put his cool head and imperturbable serenity to the test — but I refrained."

"You were right," said Nora; "I suppose you declined his visits and avoided him as much as possible?"

"Not exactly. I mentioned to him and Waldemar, in the course of conversation, that no widow ought to think of marriage for at least two years after her husband's death, and then we got on quite pleasantly together until he was removed to Italy, and Waldemar went with him there, and afterwards to England. More than two years have elapsed since that time," continued Irene; "the marriage of Waldemar's brother to Charlotte Falkner afforded me a good excuse for going to the Benndorffs. Monsieur Torp has become *milord* Medvie, and my prudent scruples are at an end. I expected to

meet him at Herrenburg, and had resolved, for his sake, to give up hunting or even shooting at a target, having by chance heard that he has a horror of what he calls masculine women."

"And Count Waldemar?" asked Nora.

"Oh! he does not mind — rather likes that sort of thing, I believe. His intercourse with Lord Medvie, or his visit to England, has greatly improved him; he has grown much more steady and quiet, and seems as little in a hurry as myself to come to an explanation: nevertheless, I don't intend to give him an opportunity if I can help it; so I have requested my brother Ferdinand to go with me this evening to the marsh; as with a Hungarian chasseur, who can speak but little German and no French, our *tête-à-tête* would be as complete as if we were alone."

"You naturally wish to avoid paining him by a refusal," observed Nora, gravely.

"I want to gain time," replied Irene, laughing, "because I — don't feel quite so sure of *ce grand Charles* as I could wish; but I suppose he can be cajoled, like other men. They are all vain, more or less, Nora — very nearly as vain as we are, and only a little wiser."

"I suppose," said Nora, with some hesitation, "you have considered the — a — possibility of Lord Medway's having already — disposed of his heart — or at least not being sufficiently fancy free to —"

"To be sure — of course I have thought of all that," interposed Irene, "and questioned Waldemar directly after he came to Herrenburg. He assured me that milord is not engaged, nor likely to be, as he has become more fastidious than ever, and so full of fancies about what

the future *milady* is to be, that Waldemar is prepared to fall down in adoration of her perfections whenever she is made known to the world!"

"And this fastidiousness has not alarmed you?" asked Nora.

"Not at all; love is blind, or rather blinded by a bandage, which is sometimes drawn over his ears, so that he is made deaf too. Now, without being either blind or deaf, a man might take a fancy to me, Nora; and I am greatly mistaken if milord has not lived long enough abroad to have got over all absurd prejudices in favour of his stiff, cold countrywomen!"

She bent over the table to look at her watch, and then rang the bell. "I believe it is time to change my dress," she added; "but you must not leave me. I want to ask you a hundred questions about England, — the carnival is very gay there, is it not?"

"There is no carnival."

"Well, the season — or whatever you call it?"

"It may be gay," said Nora, "but I know nothing about it."

"Ah, true — you were living with an old uncle, whose wife was dead, and you had no one to go out with; but the country-houses, full of guests, must be delightful."

"I don't know."

"I suppose, at least, I shall be in the best society?"

The entrance of her maid prevented her from observing Nora's silence, or look of astonishment; and she was, for some time afterwards, completely occupied in disembarassing herself of the thousand details of her elaborate demi-toilette.

Nora went to a window and made some observation about the beauty of the sunset, the lake, and wooded mountains.

"I perceive your taste in scenery has not changed," replied Irene; "indeed you are quite what you used to be, if it were not for the English reserve — not so say coldness of manner — that you have acquired."

"Reserve!" repeated Nora. "I never heard that I was reserved!"

"You were not, but you are now. Here have I forgotten our ten years' separation, and talked to you as if we had never been apart; while you have listened and looked at me as if I were some strange being, whose character you were trying to understand."

Nora made no attempt to deprecate. She *had* been studying her friend; and now, while standing at the window, modified her previous rigorous judgment of her by the recollection that, ten years previously, they had greatly resembled each other in disposition; and that, perhaps, or rather most probably, had she been subjected to the allurements and temptations of the world like Irene, her thoughts and actions would have become similar. She no longer regretted the years spent in tranquil retirement with her uncle in Russell-square — and believed the old house there had been to her a sanctuary.

When she looked round, Irene was already dressed in a pair of loose trousers, and what appeared a very short green riding-habit; on her head she placed a remarkably pretty and picturesque hat, also green, with black cocks' feathers, and chamois beard; and, if Nora thought this hunting-attire somewhat fantastical, she felt obliged to acknowledge that it was very becoming to a figure so symmetrical as that of Irene.

"I like the dress, too," said the latter; "and Waldemar says I only want a falcon on my wrist to make it perfect, — but the — the other does *not* like it, I suspect; so, if you have no objection, we will go down the back staircase, and take refuge in the boat-house."

To the boat-house they went, and there found the chasseur, with fowling-piece and dogs. Irene sent him to summon her brother and Count Waldemar; but scarcely had he left them, when Torp approached, and announced himself as substitute for the latter, who had been detained by business.

"Where?" she asked, abruptly.

"In the town, or the village. He went to speak to Baron Waltenburg about the sale of the ruins of the castle."

"Could he not have spoken to him at the ball to-night? I am sure he is invited."

"Most probably — but they are going to examine the ruins with an architect; and Waldemar thought, for once in a way, you would be satisfied with me as substitute. I fear he was mistaken."

"Not at all," cried Irene, hastily — and she blushed beautifully, while she added, "I am only sorry you have seen me in this dress, or, rather, going out in this way; for I know you dislike and disapprove of everything unfeminine. I am beginning, myself, to think these amusements very unladylike, and seriously meditate giving them up altogether."

"Your dress," said Torp, stopping to caress one of the dogs, "is exceedingly becoming; and I am well acquainted with it from Waldemar's sketch-book. As to what is ladylike or not, my ideas have greatly changed

of late, — so much depends on the way in which things are done, and the person who —”

Nora heard no more; unobserved, as she thought, by either of the speakers, she had turned to the monastery, and was, soon after, on her way to the village.

The neighbouring town furnished musicians and guests for the ball; the latter were numerous — and among them so many good dancers, that Nora scarcely had time to rest during the evening. As this constitutes happiness to women of German education, she might have been supposed to have enjoyed herself in an unusual degree, — that she appeared to do so — perhaps, even wished to make others think so — is certain; but the reader must be informed that a foolish desire, on her part, to watch the progress of her friend's designs on Torp completely destroyed her pleasure. The interest that she began to feel about him was singular enough — still more so, that she was perfectly conscious of it; she even saw through his design of convincing her that his disappointment could be easily borne, and would be soon forgotten; and she was quite aware that, circumstanced as he was just then, the evident predilection of such a woman as Irene Schaumberg must be very flattering, and particularly agreeable, when shown in *her* presence. They were seated together at a window, — neither danced nor looked at the dancers, — and hour after hour passed over in conversation that never seemed to flag.

Waldemar, at first, appeared exceedingly amused at this flirtation, and devoted himself to Nora; but, later in the evening, she heard his brother remonstrating with him, and pointing out the absurdity of his position.

“It may be absurd,” said Waldemar; “but I see no

remedy — for I have no right to interfere. You can signify your displeasure to Charlotte Falkner, to whom you are going to be married to-morrow; or, seeing that Ernst placed a ring of betrothal on Miss Nixon's finger after dinner to-day, he may show anger or jealousy, should she dance again with Waltenburg; but what would Irene say were I to order her not to talk any more to Torp, whom she has known as long, and almost as intimately, as she knows me?"

"You have neglected her of late, Waldemar," said his brother; "shirked the duck-shooting this evening on some frivolous pretence, and have not asked her to dance — though you know there is nothing she resents so much."

At this moment Waldemar's mother came towards him, and, perhaps, said something to the same purport, for he shrugged his shoulders and walked off in the direction of the window.

Nora watched the scene that followed with intense interest. Waldemar spoke, but seemed scarcely to be heard by Irene; he persisted, and she shook her head and raised her hand, as if to waive him off; he seated himself on a chair near hers, and she turned from him with a very significant gesture of annoyance; then his eyes flashed, and he said something that seemed to provoke an angry reply. Torp rose, laughed, and left them. A few more words were spoken, and then Irene stood up haughtily, and walked across the room towards Nora, whispering, as she passed her, "The die is cast; I have quarrelled with Waldemar for presuming to suppose he had a right to be jealous, and can now only hope that all may go on smoothly with the other. I trust these men will not have any disagreement on my account."

They had none; but both perambulated their respective rooms for more than an hour after their return to the inn; the door between them, however, remained closed.

CHAPTER XIX.

On Guard.

ABOUT noon the next day a well-arranged procession moved from one of the reception rooms at St. Benedict's down the tastefully decorated stone staircase that led to the church of the monastery. The programme had deprived General Falkner of at least an hour's sleep during the night; but he was more than indemnified when he perceived the accuracy with which it was followed, and glanced at the brilliant appearance of his guests, who, to gratify him, and do honour to the family, were all magnificently dressed; most of the gentlemen in glittering uniforms, and the ladies no less splendid in brocaded silk and *moire antique*.

There was no weeping. The fair bride seemed to have exhausted her store of tears during the morning, if one might judge by her still red eyelids and very crimson lips, and now appeared becomingly serene. Her father carefully concealed any regret he felt at parting with his only daughter; and though her mother occasionally raised her transparent handkerchief to her eyes, it was difficult to discover any cause for the movement, excepting, perhaps, that the sunbeams were not sufficiently moderated by the coloured glass through which they shone. Georgina was exceedingly attentive to the ceremony. Mr. Nixon gazed round him, and made reflections on the difference between the vast place of

worship in which he stood, with its statues, pictures, and numerous altars, and the chapel that he was in the habit of frequenting in London, and came to the conclusion that the latter was infinitely — more comfortable!

The marriage ceremony was succeeded by a dinner, which Nora thought as tedious as it was sumptuous; for when she was following the bridal party out of the church, Rosel had left the crowd of spectators to whisper that her father had again heard of the wildschütz, and had suddenly left home with her brother. Instantly, and greatly alarmed on John's account, Nora had yielded without hesitation to Rosel's urgent entreaties to spend the night on the miller's alp, in order, if necessary, to be able to bear witness in favour of Seppel, and had only stipulated that they were to be accompanied by her mother. In consequence of this arrangement every moment became of importance to Nora, as tending to increase her chance of having to wander in the woods after sunset; therefore, the moment she found herself at liberty, after attempting a hurried sort of explanation to her uncle and cousin, not one word of which they understood, she set off on foot to the forest-house, changed her dress with the rapidity of a Cinderella, and might soon after have been seen with her iron-shod staff, climbing the mountain behind the mill; not stopping to look around her, or talking to her companions, as was her custom, but hastening forward, silent and abstracted.

When recollections of all she had heard and seen during the last two days took possession of her thoughts for a few minutes, they were chased by anxiety about her cousin John. She feared, and not without reason, a rencounter between him and his companions on the one

side and the forester and Franz on the other; and at one time her fears so far got the better of her prudence that, had Rosel been able to tell her in what direction her father had gone, she would have followed, and confessed all to him!

The sun was already below the horizon as they left the steep path in the forest, and began the ascent of the more gentle slope on which the huts were situated. The summit of the mountains beyond were still glowing in purple light, but all beneath had fallen into shade, and the cool evening breeze swept slightly over the already damp grass. The tinkling of bells became audible in all directions, showing the course taken by each herd, as it wandered forth for the night, so that the rocks, the skirts of the wood, and even far up on the sides of the mountains seemed suddenly full of life and animation. The *sennerins* stood at the door of their huts and jodeled loudly and cheerfully, occasionally pausing to hear the echo or the answering jodel from the woodmen, as they left off work; but there was one who stood there mute and melancholy, listening to the familiar sounds and gazing, perhaps for the last time, on the well-known landscape. It was Madeleine, the miller's daughter, who, however, no sooner perceived Nora than she hastened down the hill, seeming to think it necessary to apologise for her presence. "I know," she added, "that my father sold the alp with the mill yesterday, and that you have taken the cattle at a valuation, but I felt a longing to see the old place once more, and my mother said I ought to look after our cheese and butter, that we might know what we had to take with us into Tyrol. The *sennerin* has heard that I am only a guest, as it were, now — and —"

"Not so," said Nora; "the alp is yours as long as you remain at the mill."

"That will only be until next week," observed Madeleine, with a sigh.

"And by that time," continued Nora, "the cattle will at all events be driven down for the winter, so you see we expect you to supply us with milk and butter both now and to-morrow morning."

"Everything but a bed," said Madeleine. "I am afraid you will hardly be able to sleep on the straw mattress of the sennerin."

"We don't want beds," said Nora; "we have no intention of sleeping to-night — have we, Rosel?"

"No," she answered, smiling, "and there's another who mus'nt sleep either, and we're going for him as soon as the moon gets over the Rocky Horn."

"Long Seppel?" suggested Madeleine, with a faint smile.

"You've guessed it," said Rosel's mother. "The wild hunters are on this side of the frontiers, they say, and Miss Nora thinks if so be suspicion should again fall on Seppel, we can stand up for him, and say he was with us the live-long night!"

"Has the forester gone in search of the wildschütz?" asked Madeleine.

"Yes, and Franz too; he would not let his father go alone, because this wildschütz is seldom without companions."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Madeleine, "if they should happen to meet at the votive tablet, where your eldest brother was shot — there may be bloodshed."

"Are they on the Wild Alp?" asked Rosel, with a look of alarm. "My father seemed very fierce, but

would not say where he was going. There is little chance of escape for any wildschütz he may meet on that mountain."

"But," said Nora, looking up suddenly, "who told Madeleine that the wild hunters were there?"

Madeleine blushed deeply, and answered that a Tyrolean, who had been at the mill that morning, had seen them, and said they were a large party, and had dogs with them, to drive the deer across the frontiers.

"And Franz and his father have not taken any one with them," exclaimed Rosel's mother uneasily.

"Oh I hope — I trust — they may not meet," cried Madeleine, evidently sharing her anxiety. "The forester will perhaps go on to the huts, and then the others intend to keep along the frontier line, and may not be very far from this about daybreak."

"Your informant was so accurate," observed Nora, "that I suspect he must be one of the party."

"Perhaps so," she answered, with a look of intelligence; "but," she added in a whisper, "I don't mind telling you all I know, as you are not likely to have me questioned by the judge, seeing that I might be made to say more than would be agreeable to you and yours."

Nora looked at her inquiringly.

"Some people," she continued in the same significant manner, "some people talk of a tall wildschütz, and others of a small one, and lately they've been mostly seen together."

"Are they to be together in this neighbourhood to-night?" asked Nora, quickly.

"Somewhere between this and the Wild Alp," she answered.

"We must secure Seppel at once, and if possible

bring him here," cried Nora, turning to Rosel and her mother.

To this arrangement neither objected, though the latter was evidently both heated and tired, and they were soon on their way to the woodmen's shed.

On arriving there, they found that most of the workmen had retired for the night, the others were smoking, but Seppel was neither among the sleepers nor smokers, — he had gone down to the charcoal-burners, they said, to take charge of the kiln for the night, as the man was ill and had been obliged to go home. To the charcoal kiln Nora and her companions immediately went, and as the moon rose bright and clear, above the jagged summit of the Rocky Horn, the black pile, and waving smoke above it, the wooden shed and surrounding trees were covered with a flood of light; but no human being was to be seen. It was in vain that Nora walked round the kiln, and the others examined the shed, which was almost completely filled with charcoal, no Seppel could be found; and after a close inspection of every rock and heap of wood around them, Nora put her hand on Rosel's arm, and asked gravely, "What do you expect me to think now?"

"Think!" she repeated, "think, that he has gone to the fountain: he is not likely to drink the water here, when there is fresher and better to be had within a stone's throw."

Nora and the forester's wife seated themselves on the rough bench, beneath the overhanging gable roof of the shed. "I fear," she said, dejectedly, "I fear he is not so near as you imagine, but I am quite willing to wait here until you have convinced yourself that he is not at the fountain."

"Surely, Miss Nora, you cannot suppose that he would undertake the charge of a charcoal kiln, on the borders of the forest, and leave it for any length of time by night or by day?"

"Perhaps he ought not," said Nora, "and you can scarcely be more unwilling than I am to believe that Seppel is still a wildschütz; but from first to last, appearances and circumstances have been strongly against him, — more so, Rosel, than you suppose, or than I am at liberty to tell you."

"That may be," she answered; "but I cannot and will not believe that he has deceived me. Let me only step down to the spring and convince you that he is within call."

"Do so," said Nora; "I am more than willing to be convinced, and hope, with all my heart, that he may answer you."

Five minutes, ten minutes, passed over before Nora's not particularly pleasant reflections were interrupted by the sound of Rosel's loud clear call, the same peculiar succession of tones she had used when on her way to the Crag, for the first time with Nora, soon after the arrival of the latter at the village. A faint echo repeated the notes in a confused uncertain manner, and as it died away, Nora thought she heard the sound of something near her moving. She stood up and looked round — again Rosel's voice, more loud than ever, was heard beneath; but scarcely had the last note been uttered before the wooden walls of the shed were shaken in a remarkable manner, and Nora and the forester's wife, fearing that the roof was about to fall on their heads, sprang from beneath it, and gazed upwards in some alarm. Then it was that they perceived for the first

time, just beneath the gable, a sort of framework of boards, that by a great stretch of the imagination might have been called a balcony, and in this narrow place Seppel seemed to have made his bed, for he was raising himself from a recumbent posture, and staring round him like a man wakened from heavy slumber. A moment afterwards his long legs were dangling over the side, until they reached a ladder at some distance beneath, whence, flourishing his arms in the air, he shouted vociferously; afterwards, to Nora's infinite amusement, he sprang to the ground, and approaching her deferentially, he raised his hand to his temple, in military salute.

"I am very glad to see you, Seppel," she said, smiling, "for I was afraid that the bright moonlight might have tempted you once more to go out with that reckless —"

"Miss Nora," he said, interrupting her eagerly, "I was not out last month, nor can any weather tempt me to break the vow I made at St. Hubert's. Rosel," he added, reproachfully, as he turned to the panting girl, who then joined them, "did you too mistrust me?"

"No, no — not for a moment — I thought to find you at the spring."

"Can you tell me where my cousin is just now?" asked Nora, a little impatiently.

"You mean the young gentleman?" said Seppel, with a perplexed air.

"Yes. I want to see him, or send him a letter without delay."

"Give it to the Tyrolean sennerin, Miss Nora. She saw him last Sunday, when she went down to the valley. She'll deliver it safely, and bring you an answer, too, if you require one."

Nora perceived he was determined not to commit himself in any way, and that she must apply to the sennerin in the morning for information. "What are we to do now?" she said, turning to Rosel. "If Seppel cannot leave his charocal, who is to watch him?"

Rosel, of course, did not know.

"Could not one of the other woodmen take his place for to-night," suggested Rosel's mother, "and then he would be at liberty to return with us to the alp."

"There's not a charcoal-burner among them," said Seppel; "but if you cannot make up your mind to trust me, maybe it would be as well to leave Rosel here on guard as it were, at least until after nightfall, and again about daybreak she might go the rounds — these are the hours of strong temptation for a wildschütz, which, however, with your leave, I beg to say I am not—and hav'n't been for many a year."

"What is to be done now?" asked Nora, turning to the forester's wife, who had again seated herself on the bench, and was yawning unrestrainedly.

At that moment they were startled by the report of distant firearms.

"Where's that?" cried Rosel.

"Between this and St. Hubert's I should think," answered Seppel; "perhaps the forester has brought down a buck."

"Not likely," said Rosel, "for he has lately been watching one in that direction for the lady from Vienna, who is going out next week with Count Waldemar. I'm afraid it must be the wild hunters."

"Well, I shouldn't wonder if it were," said Seppel, "and precious bunglers they must be to require so much

lead for a single buck, on such a night as this, when one can aim as at a target."

"Anything," rejoined Rosel, "is better than a meeting with my father and Franz. I hope they have shot the buck, and made good their escape into Tyrol, though my father will be as mad as a March hare for a week to come."

"I think, Miss Nora," said the forester's wife, "we may now leave Seppel to attend to his charcoal. If he should be asleep when we return here, instead of awakening him, Rosel must mount the ladder, and make his face as black as a chimney-sweeper's."

They returned to the alp, and after a frugal supper, Nora crossed the ravine with Madeleine, and questioned the Tyrolean sennerin about her cousin John. The girl, however, could give no information concerning him, excepting that he was well, and not likely to return to Almenau for some time. She accompanied Nora back to the miller's hut, and remained there until Rosel and her mother retired to the sleeping-room, where they shared a palliasse on the floor with Madeleine. Nora, who professed to be neither tired nor drowsy, then seated herself outside the open door of the hut, and looked at the moon and stars, the trees and distant mountains, listening to the sound of the cattle-bells, while thinking of Seppel and Rosel, Jack and the wildschütz, the forester and his son, Torp and Irene, Waldemar, St. Benedict's and the ball there. It was strange, she thought, to feel so little fatigued, after having danced so much, and slept but a few hours the previous night — she supposed her anxiety about Jack kept her awake — she would go to the Tyrolean sennerin at the other side of the ravine, in — the — morning — Very odd that the moon

seemed to dance up and down — no, it was only the reflection in the water of the spring, retained in the hollowed trunk of a tree, for the use of the cattle — and now the wood seemed to slide backwards and forwards — Macbeth — wood of Dunsinane — Austrian troops on the march with green branches in their helmets — national customs — singular — effects — of — moon — light —.

Nora slept.

CHAPTER XX.

Jack's Last Exploit.

NORA slept, and so soundly, that hours passed over as if they had been so many minutes. She was awakened by the murmuring of voices not far distant from her, and, on opening her eyes, she perceived two men at the fountain below the hut. One sat at the end of the water-trough, in a desponding attitude, the other stood leaning lightly against the upright stem that served as conductor to the water, which flowed incessantly, and in a profusion only common in wooded mountainous districts. As soon as Nora discovered them to be the forester and his son, she rose and approached them; the former raised his hat for a moment, and then, replacing it on his head, drew it over his eyebrows with a vehement jerk; the latter held his in his hand, while expressing some surprise at finding her at the alp.

"I heard of your having gone out, and became so uneasy about Seppel, and a — in short, I made Rosel and her mother come up here with me, and we went directly to see Seppel, who has taken charge of the charcoal kiln for the night."

"It was there he blackened his face," muttered the forester, with closed teeth.

"We found him sleeping as quietly as we could have desired," continued Nora, "and intend to go again to the kiln before midnight."

"Then you must wait four-and-twenty hours, Miss Nora, for midnight is long past."

Nora looked at her watch, and found he was right. "I am afraid," she began, hesitatingly, "they have shot the roebuck you were keeping for the general."

"The buck's safe," replied the forester, grimly, "and so is Franz, though they aimed well, considering the distance;" while speaking, he snatched the hat from his son's hand, and put his fingers through two holes in it, as if to show the direction taken by the bullet.

"Good heavens! you have had a conflict with the wildschütz after all!"

"Yes," said the forester, sternly; "the long schütz fired at Franz, and — and then — I shot him — dead, I believe, or wounded him mortally. They were six to two, and he need not have fired; 'tis true, I shot their dog — but it was not his dog — Seppel has no dog —"

"It was not Seppel — it was certainly not Seppel," cried Nora, eagerly; "we were with him when the shots were fired, and heard them distinctly, notwithstanding the distance."

"Not Seppel," cried the forester, springing up; "I'd give all I'm worth to be sure of that! If I had not been made frantic, by seeing him aim deliberately at Franz, while the others were shouting to me, and if the bullet had not so nearly done its work, I'd not have fired. Six to two was fearful odds, and we had to fly for our lives afterwards."

"Come at once to the charcoal kiln," said Nora, "and convince yourself that Seppel is alive and well."

In expectation, perhaps, of another visit from Rosel and Nora, Seppel had not returned to his balcony, but lay stretched at full length on the bench beneath, his hands clasped under his head by way of pillow, and sleeping as soundly as hard work and exposure to the air could make him. The forester signed that he should not be wakened, and then leaned on his staff and contemplated the man, whose supposed death had caused him such deep regret during the last few hours, notwithstanding all his efforts to convince himself that a wildschütz was no loss, and that his daughter could never have married him.

Meanwhile, Nora had drawn Franz aside, and asked for some clear account of what had happened.

"It is easily given," he said, gravely; "we heard that the long wildschütz had been seen again in the neighbourhood of the Wild Alp, but my father rightly judged that it was probable he was hunting the buck we have been preserving for the general and his guests, at St. Benedict's, so we went at once to a well-known grazing-place among the rocks, between this and St. Hubert's, and, sure enough, hardly had we got within rifle shot of the frontier, before we saw one of the dogs of these fellows hunting our game across the boundary for them. My father shot the dog, and had but just time to load again, before the Tyroleans, who must have heard the report of the rifle, came in sight. I think they supposed us stronger than we were, for there were rocks enough to have concealed a dozen men behind us, and that made them keep at a distance, and commence a dispute; they said they were on Tyrolean ground, we

knew we were on Bavarian; in the heat of argument the rifles were raised — my father says, the long schütz aimed at me, at all events he fired the first shot, and his bullet went through my hat. You know what followed."

"Do you think they were all Tyroleans?" asked Nora, anxiously.

"No; the man that we took for Seppel, and another fellow, had grey Bavarian jackets, and wore hats like mine."

"I suppose," said Nora, "that no one else was wounded, as you did not fire."

"Yes, I did, but without aiming, and suspect I must have hit one of them, for they fired a few random shots after us during our retreat. As they were all more or less disguised with false beards, kerchiefs, charcoal, or brick-dust, I think they would even have pursued us, had their leader been less dangerously wounded. If he had any life in him they most probably carried him across the frontiers to the nearest surgeon."

"A horrible business altogether," said Nora. "Your father seems to feel it greatly."

"As long as he thought it was Seppel, whom he has known from a child, who was my murdered brother's playmate, and my sister's future husband, he took it to heart greatly, and was several times so overcome, that we were twice as long as need be on our way here; but I am much mistaken, if he will not now go home and inform the forstmeister and judge, without any feeling of compunction, that he has shot a notorious wildschütz, and is ready to stand his trial."

"And what will happen then?" asked Nora.

"He will plead self-defence and my defence; I can

swear that the wildschütz fired the first shot, and then he will be acquitted."

"Come, Franz," said the forester, in a low voice as he joined them, "our way now is down hill and without delay."

"Father," observed Franz, glancing towards the sleeper, "I now see that I accused Seppel unjustly, and that the judge was right when he said there was no convincing evidence against him. It was the wildschütz we saw to-night, who was on the Wild Alp; he would have murdered me there, had he dared, and only failed in this last attempt, I do believe, by a special interposition of Providence. I wonder how I have made myself such a bitter enemy, for I have not been long enough assistant-forester to become implacably hated by these men as yet!"

"It was odd enough," said the forester, musingly, "odd enough that you were aimed at, when I was standing by; but there was no mistake, Franz — that fellow wanted your life-blood."

Day was beginning to dawn as they approached the alp again. The forester carried his hat in his hand, to let the cold morning air blow on his flushed and haggard face; his son had been long silent, and Nora wished they would both leave her, as she wanted to question the Tyrolean sennerin about Jack, and the woman was now walking round her hut, and shouting her *ranz des vaches* in all directions. The cattle began to assemble; they issued from the wood, wound round the rocks, or ascended from the depths of the valley below.

"Franz," said the forester, hurrying forward, "I shall return to the village by the shortest way;" and he

turned to the path that Nora had once seen Torp take with equal impetuosity.

"I shall accompany Miss Nora to the miller's hut, father, and then follow you," he answered, walking on gravely before Nora, and stopping to assist her more frequently than was necessary.

They passed the Tyrolean sennerin, who nodded her morning greeting, and continued to shout her *ranz des vaches*, even while she turned after Nora, and mysteriously drawing a piece of folded paper from beneath the folds of her neck-kerchief, made signs to her to ask no questions in the presence of her companion.

Nora glanced at the address, which was written with a pencil. It was Jack's hand-writing; and, relieved of much of her anxiety, she dropped the paper into her pocket, and then followed Franz, who was waiting to assist her down the side of the ravine that separated them from the miller's hut. Her entreaties that he would not give himself so much trouble, were vain; he mounted the other side and accompanied her to the hut. As they approached it, Nora saw him start and hesitate, and on looking up perceived a man seated on the bench outside; he was leaning against the wood piled there, and seemed to have considered it too early to expect admittance, for the door was still closed, and while waiting for daylight he had apparently fallen asleep.

"Who is it?" asked Nora.

"Black Seppel from the mill," he answered, gloomily; "he has come to visit Madeleine."

"Who, it seems, is not yet up," said Nora.

"She is; I saw her at the other side of the house as we came up the rocks."

Nora now understood why he had persisted in his

attentions to her, and was not a little surprised when Madeleine came to meet them, and invited Franz to enter the hut through the cowhouse. He stopped at the door, however, and observed abruptly, "Black Seppel is waiting for admittance at the hut door."

"I know it, — he has been there this long time. He told me he would come here about daybreak."

"And, knowing this," said Franz, sternly, "you sent me word I should find you on the alp, and that you hoped I would not pass your hut without speaking to you? Oh Madeleine, Madeleine, have you not caused calamities enough without adding a meeting just now between Seppel and me, when you know how full of jealousy and anger we are, and how mortally we hate each other."

"Don't speak so harshly, Franz; I did not know he was coming here when I sent the sennerin to you. My mother never leaves me for a moment, and he and my father are always watching me, so that I have never been able to see you since the day I was obliged to say that I must give you up for ever."

"And what else have you to say now?" asked Franz, coldly.

"That I *have* loved you, and will ever love you better than any one in the world," she replied, bursting into tears.

"Yet people in the village, those who know you better than I do, Madeleine, assert that this is not the case, and say there is scarcely a young man in the parish, who has not had hopes of being chosen by you, at one time or other."

"I never — loved — any one — but you," sobbed Madeleine.

"There was Anderl of the Craggs," said Franz.

"The churl! I never thought of him."

"And Florian?"

"I laughed at him — and you laughed with me, Franz."

"But I did not laugh at Black Seppel, the Tyrolean," said Franz; "and people tell me now you said often and publicly, that he was a man of the right sort, of whom every one was afraid but yourself, but that you could lead him as if he were a child, and you even exhibited your power over him on several occasions in a very remarkable manner. I hope it may last, Madeleine — I wish you every happiness, and now, farewell."

"Stay, oh stay," she cried, beseechingly. "What you have said is true, quite true, but I was forced to act as I did; he'd have worried my father's life out, if I had not kept fair with him. You know he stood by us in our poverty, and we could not compel him to leave us afterwards."

"This may be the case," said Franz, evidently moved at her distress, and flattered by her professions of affection. "Still — still you might have broken off with me to satisfy your father, without having yourself betrothed to the Tyrolean the very next day! That was what showed me what you were, Madeleine;" he continued, working himself into anger at the recollection, "and the people are right after all, who say you never cared for me, and only sought a plausible pretext to give me up for the now rich Seppel — the miller from the valley of the Inn!"

"Franz, Franz!" she cried, passionately, "if ever I acted well in my life, it was on that occasion, and if I have been foolish and vain, my punishment will be hard

and long. Only say that you forgive me, and that you believe I love you, and I will bear without murmuring all the trials that I know are before me."

* * * * *

Meantime Nora had entered the hut, and by the grey light that found its way as yet but sparingly through the small windows, with difficulty deciphered her cousin John's note.

"DEAREST NORRY,

"Tell the governor anything you can invent for me in a hurry, for I cannot return to the village for some days. We have had hot work with those blackguards the foresters, and of the poor fellow who was killed, you will hear soon enough. I represent the wounded — but don't be alarmed, it is of no consequence, only a small slice of flesh out of my left arm, and as the landlord's son at the inn beyond St. Hubert's is a famous fellow for binding up scratches of this kind, and won't peach for many reasons, I am on my way there now, and shall write to you again in a day or two. Don't on any account come to me, as it might create suspicion, and this time I *am* in a fix and no mistake."

"What can I do?" thought Nora, "this innkeeper's son is probably an ignorant peasant, and, if Jack's wound should be ill-treated, all the responsibility of the neglect will fall on me. My going to him might, as he says, create suspicion, and would be useless, as he ought to be taken to some town — to Innsbruck, perhaps — for advice. There is but one person to whom I can apply — and that is — Charles Thorpe. Oh, how unwillingly I do it! — but there is no alternative, and — if I

make haste, Franz can take a few lines from me to him — in time to prevent his making any excursion, or going out to shoot with Irene, before I have seen him."

She tore a leaf out of her pocket-book, and wrote with a pencil:

"Something very unpleasant has occurred, and I should be much obliged by your meeting me, coming at the forest-house any time after nine o'clock this morning. — LEONORA."

Frontier Alp — Miller Hut — 4 o'clock, A.M.

When Nora ran out with her note, Franz was holding Madeleine's hands, and looking at her earnestly. "I believe — and I — forgive you," he said, slowly. "I pity you, and oh, Madeleine!" he added, vehemently, "I love you still — far, far more than I dare to tell you!" He drew her towards him for a moment, then freeing himself with a sort of desperate effort from her detaining hand, rushed from the hut, leaving her so overwhelmed with grief, that she was perfectly unconscious of Nora's presence, as she passed her in pursuit of Franz.

Nora did not expect — did not, perhaps, wish — to overtake him immediately; but as he swung himself recklessly down the rocks of the ravine, she called his name loudly, threw her note as far as she could after him, saw that he returned to pick it up, and then slowly retraced her steps to the hut.

Madeleine had not time for the indulgence of her grief; Nora found her, on her return, among the assembled cattle, talking, with perhaps forced composure, to the sennerin, who was milking the cows: she averted her face, as if she feared that the very evident traces of tears on it might be observed, and taking up some sticks

that lay on the ground, said she would light a fire and make coffee.

Nora followed her to the hearth, and saw, through the open door of the sleeping-room, that Rosel and her mother still rested undisturbed on their straw mattress, looking warm and placid, while *she*, though infinitely less personally interested in all that had just occurred, felt feverish, anxious, and restless. Having observed that the front door, when opened to admit the morning air, made the chimney smoke, she left the hut altogether, and drew the door to as she went out. For a moment she could have supposed it evening again; once more the moon was pale and cloud-like, the woods beneath looked dark and indistinct, the ground about her, still in shade, was damp with dew, and the rocks that formed the summit of the mountains were glowing afresh in violet blue, but instead of darkening coldly into night, the colour lightened and brightened, until they shone resplended in golden yellow. Rapidly the daylight now spread around, long shadows seemed to start from the trees and rocks, and while Nora slowly walked to the spring, and dipped her hands into the ice-cold water, with which the capacious wooden trough was filled, a flood of light swept over the hut and all in its vicinity, red sunbeams sparkled on the little windows, and Madeleine, as if tempted by the cheerful gleam that had so suddenly penetrated into the interior, appeared for a moment at the door, glanced towards the Tyrolean as he leaned against the pile of wood which still kept him half in the shade, but perhaps perceiving, as Nora had done, that his hat was drawn over his eyebrows, and his head bent on his breast, so that nothing but a bearded chin was visible, she made no attempt to rouse him from

slumbers so profound, and entering the hut again closed the door as before.

Meanwhile, Nora continued her ablutions, and felt greatly refreshed; she sat down afterwards on a protruding rock below the fountain, to arrange her hair, and, after having completed her rustic toilet, weariness induced her to stretch out her feet, and lay herself at full length on the hard resting-place. It was, probably, this circumstance, added to her grey dress, the absence of all coloured ribbons, and the intervening fountain, that made her unperceived by the old miller, as he hurried, with evident effort, up the slope to the hut. His manner, however, instantly attracted her attention; for, after glancing furtively round him, he advanced towards the sleeper — slowly, warily, reluctantly — then sat down on the bench beside him, and moved stealthily and irresolutely backwards and forwards — at one time sitting bolt upright, as if listening to some noise within the hut, then sidling up to the Tyrolean, bending down, and peering into his face; at length, he raised his hand, thrust it cautiously into the bosom of the unconscious man, and, after a search of a few seconds, drew forth a small paper packet, which, probably, from agitation, he let fall on the ground. Snatching it up, he retreated by the way he had come; and, before Nora had recovered from her astonishment at what she had witnessed, he was again approaching the alp, tremulously calling his daughter's name, and hastening towards the weather-beaten clump of fir-trees behind the hut, which he entered through the cow-house.

It required but little reflection to enable Nora to understand the motives of the theft she had seen committed. The miller had put himself in possession of the

papers that would convict him of having consented to, if not instigated, the burning of his mill; and the poor old man had been so tyrannically treated by the Tyrolean, that she could not help rejoicing in his regained freedom, and the chance given him of restoring the money he had dishonestly acquired. She moved a little further down the hill, that she might not be supposed to have seen what had passed, and was so completely out of sight, that Madeleine sent Rosel to look for her. As the latter ran towards her, gaily singing, Nora felt it impossible just then to damp her mirth, by telling her all she knew about her father; so she only mentioned having visited Seppel again towards daybreak, and having found him sleeping beside his kiln.

And Rosel laughed, and talked, and sang; and the cattle dispersed over the alp, lowing loudly, and a couple of cows, with large copper bells, trotted past towards the spring, the goats springing after them, bleating, and, in the midst of all, the Tyrolean lounged lazily on the bench, as if unwilling to rouse himself.

"He sleeps as soundly as Seppel at the charcoal kiln last night," said Rosel, in reply to Nora's expressions of surprise, as they approached the hut. "He told Madeleine he would come here this morning; but, though she professes to prefer his absence to his company, I don't think she is quite pleased to see him sleeping, as she says he has done for the last two hours, under her window, without a word of greeting, as if he did not care to notice now that he is sure of her. I am no friend of his, as you may well suppose; but I told her when a man is downright tired, it is better to leave him in peace."

"That man," said Nora, slowly, "is not tired — is not sleeping, — he is — dead!"

She had observed that not the slightest change of position had taken place from the time she had first seen him, and now perceived that, when the old man had abstracted the letters, he had laid bare part of a shirt saturated with blood. Even while she spoke, a light seemed to break upon her, and the conviction flashed across her mind, that the man before her was the wildschütz Seppel!

Rosel raised the hat from his brows, and exposed the features of a corpse. The colour forsook her face as she turned to Nora, and asked, in a scarcely audible voice, "Who has done this? Not Franz — not my brother —"

"No," answered Nora; "but," she added, reluctantly, "I saw your father this morning, and he told me he had, in self-defence, shot the wildschütz, about whom we have talked so much lately. I think it more than probable that this is the man."

"This man was no wildschütz," said Rosel; "he made a vow, the day he shot his brother by accident, never to touch gun, rifle, or fowling-piece again as long as he lived. A Tyrolean has courage to do anything but break a vow, Miss Nora — my father is in trouble, at all events; — I fear that my brother may know something of this man's death; so, if you will not take it amiss, I should like to return home without delay."

"Go," said Nora. "After I have spoken a few words to the miller, I shall follow, and, I hope, overtake you before you reach the cascades."

Rosel sprang down the hill, and was soon out of sight. Nora looked into the hut, and made a sign to

the miller to join her, which he obeyed, with evident reluctance.

"You know what has happened," said Nora, pointing to the Tyrolean.

"Yes, — one of them called at the mill, soon after midnight, and told me."

"So, this Seppel was the wildschütz after all," said Nora; "yet Rosel could not believe it possible, because he had made a vow never to touch a gun or rifle as long as he lived."

"No more he did," answered the miller; "he always carried a long pistol, with the butt-end of a gun screwed on it!"

"And you knew this," said Nora, reproachfully, "and allowed Seppel from the Craggs to suffer for his fault!"

"I could not help myself," said the old man, querulously; "I was under obligations, and could not betray him; so, on pretence of visiting his father, he has lately had his sport regular, like the forester, or forstmeister himself! *I* never touched the venison he brought home to us on occasions; but I cannot answer for my wife and daughter, — it's the nature of women to like game from a wildschütz, and silk kerchiefs from a smuggler."

"So he was a smuggler, too?"

"In a small way — with tobacco and silk; but I hope you won't mention this, or say anything about me or my family to the judge, Miss Nora — for he'd make me confess everything in no time. I'd be sorry, indeed, to bring the young Englishman into trouble — and he's a marked man now that he has fired at the forester, and got a wound in his arm. It's better to keep quiet, and say nothing about the matter to friend or foe, and in a

few days we shall have left the village altogether, either for Tyrol or Munich."

"Munich!" repeated Nora, "what induces you to think of Munich?"

"I don't know why we should go to Tyrol now," he said, pointing to the Tyrolean: "in Munich, we shall be *preevateers* (*privatiers*), and something may turn up for Madeleine. If my wife and daughter, and the man that's now sitting dead on this bench, had not been against me, I'd have gone to America, six years ago. I think I'd have felt more peaceful and happy there — it's a fine land they say, and people don't concern themselves so much about their neighbour's affairs, as they do here. I've had an unquiet life of late, Miss Nora — what with my daughter, and that man there, and the evil speaking, and the 'nonmous letters, I've been harassed a' most to death."

Nora knew that a consciousness of crime had caused the old man's misery, and felt glad when he added that he and his wife intended to speak to "his reverence," the next day, and follow his advice whatever it might cost them.

She understood this to refer to the restitution of the money paid by the insurance office, but no look of consciousness betrayed her knowledge of his affairs.

At this moment, Madeleine called out "Father, you are keeping Miss Nora from her coffee, all this time, and it is getting cold. Seppel, I suppose, is awake at last, and expecting his breakfast — tell him he may come for it when he chooses."

The miller and Nora looked at each other, and the latter, unwilling to witness the effect which the communication, that was now unavoidable, would have on

Madeleine, took up her staff, and requesting him to tell the forester's wife to follow her as quickly as possible, she turned abruptly from the hut, and commenced a rapid descent of the mountain.

It was still early when Nora and her companion approached the forest-house, yet Torp was already there, apparently waiting for her as he leaned against the garden-paling, and looked towards the wood, through which her path lay; — he advanced to meet her, too, but stopped suddenly as she pronounced the name he had requested her *not* to call him. Unconscious of the cause of his frigid bow, Nora commenced an embarrassed apology for the liberty she had taken in requesting him to meet her, ending with the assurance that nothing but dire necessity would have induced her to apply to him on the present occasion.

No statue could have been more immoveable than Torp at that moment.

"I want your assistance," she continued, with evident effort; "but I begin to fear that I have not courage to ask it."

Torp's features relaxed a little: "Let me assure you," he answered, with calm politeness, "that I am quite ready to be made use of in any way you may require."

"Unfortunately," said Nora, with ill-concealed annoyance — "unfortunately you are the only person to whom I can confide all my difficulties and fears, without reserve — you alone can understand the whole state of the case, without explanations, and assist me without exciting unpleasant suspicions."

"Reasons enough for employing me," said Torp; "and now let me know in what way I can make myself useful."

"You have heard of the wildschütz, who was shot last night!"

"Yes; and I was glad to hear it was not the young cuirassier, about whom you have felt so much interest lately."

"Thank you," said Nora. "The wildschütz proves to have been black Seppel, the miller's man; but unhappily my cousin John was with him, and has let me know that he has been wounded in this unlucky affair — he says slightly, though, as he cannot return here, and is under the care of an ignorant peasant —"

"Where?" cried Torp, interrupting her with every appearance of the greatest sympathy.

"At the little inn on the frontiers. You see I cannot help myself — that I am compelled to request you to go to him and — and — if necessary to take him to Innsbruck for advice."

"Of course. I shall not lose a moment; and you shall hear from me this evening: the sexton's son can be my messenger, and I hope the bearer of good tidings. Console yourself at present with the thought that if he had been severely wounded, he could hardly have made his way across the mountains to Saint Hubert's."

"True," said Nora; "but if the wound be indeed so slight as he represents it, why does he not return here?"

"For many reasons," said Torp, "which he did not think it prudent to write, nor have I time now to explain to you, as I must be off without delay."

He raised his hat, slightly, in the reluctant way peculiar to Englishmen, and turned from her even more quickly than he had approached.

"Proud man!" thought Nora, "I see you will never

forgive me; but you have no objection to place me under an obligation that I cannot repay, and for which you will receive my thanks with haughty composure. Oh Jack, Jack! you have put my regard for you to a severe test! No one will ever know what I have suffered during the last quarter of an hour!"

CHAPTER XX.

The Break-up.

THE promised letter arrived in the course of the evening; it was without formal commencement, and without signature; gave a perfectly satisfactory account of Jack and his wounded arm, but said that, after mature consideration, they had resolved to go on to Innsbruck to consult a surgeon, and also to be out of the way, in case a strict investigation of the wildschütz affair should be undertaken by the judge.

The forester related circumstantially all that had occurred, and what he said was corroborated by his son in a manner to force conviction of the truth of their statements. Not one of the Tyroleans concerned in the transaction could be discovered; even the dog that might have led to their detection had been removed, and nothing was found where the conflict had taken place but the long pistol already mentioned. The miller was of course questioned; but, relying on Nora's silence, his evidence was not calculated to throw much light on the subject. "Seppel had been chief workman at the mill for six years, as every one in the village knew; was a clever, industrious man, went often to see his family in Tyrol, especially lately, since his father had resigned his mill to him; might have been a wildschütz for all he

knew; supposed he was, as he had been found in such company." The judge smiled significantly, said the miller could tell more if he chose, but that it was not necessary; there was evidence enough to prove that the man had been a notorious wildschütz for nearly as many years as he had been in the village; that his figure, his name, and especially his conduct to the assistant-forester on the Wild Alp left no doubt of his having been the leader of the gang who had there behaved in such an unwarrantable manner; his having aimed at Franz instead of his father on the last occasion made it equally evident that motives of personal hatred and jealousy would have tempted him to commit murder, had an occasion presented itself. The forester and his son had unquestionably fired in self-defence, and, if no one from Tyrol appeared to witness against them, they were to be acquitted.

No one appeared — not even at the funeral. The wildschütz' friends feared they might be suspected of having been his companions in his mountain wanderings, and wisely remained at home. His father was bedridden — his mother unable to leave him; so the miller appeared as chief mourner on the occasion, and it was generally understood that he mourned not at all.

The departure of the miller and his family a few days afterwards for Munich created more sensation. There was much leave-taking, some weeping, and innumerable invitations given to the October fête, and the lodging which their cousin in Munich had taken for them. Franz disappeared for some days, and it was more than hinted that he too had gone to Munich. Good-natured people said it was to make himself useful to the miller, who was a child in business, and did not know

what to do with the heaps of money he had got from the English lady for the mill; others, disposed to judge less kindly, were heard to surmise that he had gone to procure a fresh promise of marriage from Madeleine, before she had had time to attract the attention of the young burghers of Munich. It concerns us not. He returned home within the week, looking as quiet, cheerful, and self-possessed as he had been at Ammergau, and apparently exclusively interested in the affair of his sister, whose approaching marriage now formed the principal topic of conversation in the village.

After the events related having completely cleared Seppel from all suspicion of being a wildschütz, Nora conferred the mill, and all belonging to it, on him, in the least ostentatious manner possible, the first time he returned from his work in the forest; so that, as he said himself at the forest-house in the evening, "He had come down the mountain a homeless labourer and should go to bed a rich miller!"

"A miller who has to learn his trade," observed the forester, laughing. "Now, I could have given you a certificate, Seppel, that, had Miss Nora made you assistant forester instead of miller, you'd have taken to the work as naturally as a chamois to the rocks!"

"It won't require a conjuror to make a miller of me," rejoined Seppel; "and as all the people at the mill remain there, and the water and the wheels work on as heretofore, I suppose the business will go on much as usual. If Rosel were with me, of course things would get on still better; for without her the house will soon be in disorder; and what I'm to do when the cows come from the alp, I'm sure I don't know!"

"Listen to the rich peasant talking of his people and

his cows!" cried the forester, laughing; and they all laughed, and were very happy, and Rosel repeated every word they said to Nora, and made her promise to spend the afternoon of the ensuing day at the mill.

Seppel seemed to think a white cap and a certain quantity of flour on his garments and face necessary for the representation of a miller. His moustaches, too, were amply powdered, and he appeared to have an immense quantity of work to do when Nora and Rosel came to visit him: the latter laughed with childish delight as she saw him rush up and down the ladders, carry sacks from one place to another, and make believe to have scarcely time to speak to her! Nora, too, was amused, but enjoyed much more Rosel's quieter satisfaction, as she explained the little alterations she intended to make in the house arrangements, and milked the cows, and prepared the supper for the miller and his men. Leaving her so employed, Nora seated herself on the planks near the saw-mill, and had not been long there when a carriage stopped on the road (that, as the reader may remember, formed a sort of shelf upon the opposite mountain), and, a man springing from it, ran down the green slope to the mill; and, bounding over the bridge across the stream, boisterously embraced her, with the assurance that he would never play at wildschütz again as long as he lived.

"And your arm, Jack?"

"Almost quite well. Medway's a famous fellow, Norry, and you must like him now, if only for my sake, — he has no sort of dislike to you, that's clear! And didn't I tell him what a darling you were, and how uncle Stephen did not want to have you at first, and couldn't live without you afterwards, and how you kept

his house, and took care of him when he was ill, and managed his affairs for him latterly! I told him your coming into such a fortune hadn't changed you a bit, and that you were always ready to help a fellow out of a scrape." Here he looked up, and made a sign that the carriage should drive on.

"We're the best friends possible," he continued, seating himself astride on the planks; "quite intimate, latterly, and you can't imagine how jolly he can be when he chooses. I now believe all the stories they tell of him, for I am sure he is up to anything, for all his quiet looks. He gave me a capital account of the ball at St. Benedict's, and said you looked lovely in an evening dress, which he had not expected."

"Why should I not look well in an evening dress?" asked Nora.

"Oh! I'm sure I don't know; perhaps he thought it unlikely, because he had only seen you tramping about in hob-nailed boots, and that odious straw hat! He knew more about us than I supposed; and, when I spoke of Sam, asked me if he was the man that people said you intended to marry?"

"People never said any such thing!" cried Nora.

"Well, I told him I was surprised he knew anything about that matter, for Sam could keep a secret as well as most people, especially if it concerned himself."

"And you allowed him to suppose —" began Nora, indignantly.

"Not at all!" cried Jack, interrupting her. "I told him you put an extinguisher on Sam at once; but that you were uncommonly fond of me, and that if I were ten years older you'd marry me to-morrow!"

"It seems you were very communicative," said Nora, laughing.

"We were more than a week together, and must talk of something or other, you know."

"And what did he tell you in return?"

"Why, nothing particular, excepting that he regretted not having become better acquainted with us all, and was particularly sorry that *you* had taken such a dislike to him, so I have promised to make you friends the first time you meet, and told him you often said there were few things you would not do for me, because I was the first person who loved you after you came among us."

"I am glad you said that, Jack, and it is quite true. I do like you, though you are as wild, idle, and troublesome an animal as it is possible to imagine. And now let us return to the village. You will probably have to go this evening to Saint Benedict's, to make the acquaintance of your future relations."

"And you'll be civil to 'Torp — I mean Medway, for my sake, Nora, and not let him suppose that I boasted of influence that I do not possess. He is really anxious to make up to us now, and has promised that I shall have a hunt with Waldemar, and a countess somebody to-morrow. But the queerest thing of all, Nora, is, — that he told me we should in all probability hunt the very roebuck below the Wild Alp, that cost the wildschütz his life, and has given me a mark on my arm that I shall carry to my grave."

As they drew near the inn, John looked round for his new friend, and soon discovered him sitting in the garden at a table covered with letters, that had accumulated during his absence. "Lord Medway," he cried, eagerly, "here's Nora been telling me not to make foolish

speeches about friendship, for that she has no sort of dislike to you — it's all a mistake, she says."

"I am very glad to hear it," said Torp, advancing towards them.

"John — John," cried Mr. Nixon and Georgina, from one of the windows of the inn.

"At all events," said John, "as you see I cannot wait for explanations, just shake hands and show that you are friends; you may fight it out — I mean talk the matter over as long as you like afterwards."

Torp and Nora extended their hands at the same moment. Jack laughed and ran into the house.

"Let us be friends, Leonora," said Torp, cordially, "it will be a more natural state of things, and pleasanter for us both. Destroy the letter I wrote ten years ago to your uncle — I can assure you that any annoyance or mortification it may have caused you was repaid with interest at the woodman's fountain, and we may now begin our acquaintance again, as cousins or friends — or anything you please."

Nora drew her note-book from her pocket, and silently took from it the letter of which he had spoken, and on which the marks of age, perhaps also of frequent perusal, were evident.

"Thank you," said Torp. "I perceive I might have stolen the odious scrawl six weeks ago, when I found your note-book in the forester's parlour. I had very little idea then of the importance of the contents to me."

Just then, a servant came to tell her that her uncle was waiting dinner.

"Before I go," she said, turning to Torp, "let me thank you for the care you have taken of this wild cousin of mine."

"Quite unnecessary," he answered. "I felt myself partly to blame for what had happened, and was glad of an opportunity to repair the mischief I had caused."

In the evening they met again at Saint Benedict's, where plans and arrangements were made for the breaking up of the whole party. Captain Falkner had but one day more to spend at home, and wished Mr. Nixon and his family to travel to Vienna, at the same time with him, and to this no objection could be made, as Nora had now concluded, in a satisfactory manner, the business that had brought them to Almenau.

"Give me but to-morrow to go once more to Saint Hubert's," she said to her uncle, with a smile, "and I am ready to start for Vienna at any hour the ensuing day."

"And give me," cried John, "give me also to-morrow for the hunt Lord Medway has got the general to offer me."

"Who hunts to-morrow?" asked Irene.

"Mr. John Nixon will join us, if you have no objection," answered Torp.

"Oh none whatever," she said. "I shall not be of the party, as I intend to confine myself to target-shooting in future."

Torp expressed some surprise, but none of the approbation she had perhaps expected.

"And you?" she said, — "are you too going to Vienna with the others?"

"No. As nobody is going to marry me, I don't know what I should do there at this time of year."

"You had better pay your promised visit to the Benndorffs," she observed, lightly; "and don't be too

much flattered if I say I hope you will, as I have promised to return with them to Herrenburg."

"That I expected," said Torp, laughing. "Waldemar will be pardoned, and the last act of the comedy played on the terrace overlooking the river Inn."

"You are mistaken," she said, seriously. "During the ten days you have been absent, he has been trying his utmost to make me jealous, by paying attention to Nora Nixon, and instead of piquing me, as he expected, he has convinced me that I never really cared for him at all."

"*Indeed!*" said Torp, so earnestly, and with such evident interest, that she was induced to be even more explicit, and added —

"There never was any actual engagement between us, you know. He is free, and I am free, without any further explanation being necessary."

"And— and Leonora?" asked Torp.

"Leonora!" she repeated. "Are you so intimate that you can call her Leonora?"

"Oh, not at all intimate, but we are second cousins, and that gives a right, if one choose to use it."

"She never mentioned this relationship," observed Irene, musingly.

"Perhaps you did not chance to speak of me," suggested Torp.

"On the contrary, you were frequently the subject of conversation."

Torp coloured violently, — he feared that Nora might have been as little reserved with *her* friend as he had been with his. "Then she told you of her dislike to me —" he began, after a pause.

"She told me nothing — absolutely nothing," said

Irene. "I could not even find out whether or not she liked Waldemar."

Torp regained his composure, but his inattention to what she afterwards said, was so remarkable, that he was obliged to apologize repeatedly, and in the end, supposing him interested in the routes to Vienna, which were being discussed at the tea-table, she proposed his giving an opinion on a subject with which he was so perfectly well acquainted.

He left her, but it was to watch Nora and Waldemar, as they studied a map of Tyrol together, evidently intent on cheating Mr. Nixon into a tour through the Valley of the Inn, before they allowed him to find the road that would bring their journey to a speedy conclusion.

CHAPTER XXII.

Who Wins the Wager?

IT was on a bright mild morning in autumn that Nora commenced her last walk through scenes that had become alike familiar and interesting to her. The change of season had as yet made so little alteration in the aspect of the country, that it had been almost unthought of, and quite unperceived. There were no long tracts of stubble to remind them of the approach of winter; for in these highlands but a few days after the reapers have left the corn-fields, fresh grass springs up luxuriantly, to give the ground once more its rich green covering, and not unfrequently a second harvest of the beautiful and delicate plants that belong to alpine regions. The few white clouds that variegated the deep blue sky served but to cast light and fleeting shadows

on the mountains, meadows, and woods, making the succeeding sunbeams appear still brighter by contrast, and a light breeze gently waved the shining gossamer thread, that hung on weed, bush, and bramble, or bore it aloft, to float in wavy endless lengths in the air. The red, yellow, and purple tinted leaves of the maple and beech contrasted well with the fresh green of the pine and fir; and among the branches of the scarlet-berried mountain ash, or the clustering fruit of the berberis, the cheerful chirp of a bird might be heard, as if in exultation at the continuance of warmth and sunshine.

They reached St. Hubert's at a later hour than on a former occasion: this time, however, Seppel had no prolongation of his walk, no separation from Rosel in prospect. His happiness had been made evident on the way by a succession of whoops and shouts, and long-prolonged jodels; but, as he approached the chapel, he became tranquil and thoughtful; and, on entering the little building, he knelt as reverently, and seemed quite as fervid in prayer and thanksgiving, as Rosel herself.

Nora turned towards the side-altar that had been renovated by Florian, and had scarcely had time to examine the repairs of St. Hubert's plumed hat, and the stag with the golden cross between his antlers, when she heard some one enter the chapel, and then, as if fearing to disturb its occupants, quickly retire again. On looking round, she perceived Torp standing at the door, and instantly the idea took possession of her mind, that some accident had occurred, and that he was come to break it to her.

"What has happened?" she asked, anxiously, when scarcely outside the chapel.

"Nothing — nothing, I assure you," answered Torp,

following her to the low wall that enclosed one side of the ground round the building.

"Then why are you here?" she asked, her face still pale with alarm.

"For the purpose of seeing and speaking to you, if you have no objection."

"Oh!" said Nora, recovering her colour immediately. "I thought of nothing but that tiresome Jack when I saw you. Knowing he had gone out at daybreak this morning with you and the others, and seeing you here now alone, led to the hasty conclusion that something unpleasant had occurred."

"I am not alone," said Torp. "Waldemar is with me — that is, he is now at the sexton's. We agreed to leave your cousin and Count Ferdinand the honour and glory of bringing down this much-talked-of roebuck; so they have gone off with the forester and his son beyond the Wild Alp, — and here we are, with every intention of accompanying you home whenever it is your pleasure to leave St. Hubert's."

"I have only just arrived," said Nora; "but there is nothing to prevent our going to the sexton's if you prefer it to remaining here. Rosel will be at no loss to know where to find me."

"Let us remain here," said Torp, seating himself beside her on the wall, stretching out his feet, and folding his arms in a very resolute manner. "Will you," he added, after a pause, "will you consider that I presume too much on our relationship, or friendship, if I ask what are your plans for the winter?"

"By no means," answered Nora; "but I scarcely know them myself yet. I believe I should like to travel if I could find an eligible companion; for I have no ties,

no one thing, or person, to make one place more desirable to me than another. You return to England, of course?"

"I don't know," he replied, musingly; "my movements depend on yours, for some time, at least."

Nora felt rather curious to know in what way, but did not deem it advisable to ask.

"If you remain abroad," he continued, "I shall return home, — if you go to England I shall remain in Germany, or spend the winter in Italy."

"An odd way of commencing our projected friendship," observed Nora, without looking up.

"My feelings towards you," said Torp, earnestly, "have not yet subsided into friendship, and until they have we are better apart." He paused, and then added, "You will probably be induced to reside with Jane and Harry Darwin after their marriage?"

"Certainly not," replied Nora. "I do not choose to spend the rest of my life in London and Paris, with summer-excursions in a yacht, as I know they intend to do. The world of fashion has ever been a source of danger and temptation to the Nixon family, and I have resolved to avoid it altogether."

"There is," said Torp, after a long pause, "there is one thing more which circumstances oblige me to say, — something that I ought to recommend, and know not how."

"It is difficult to imagine what it can be," said Nora, "excepting, perhaps, that you know of some house to be let, or sold, or of some respectable widow willing to be the companion of a wayward heiress."

"I was about to speak of a respectable *man* who wishes for the situation you have mentioned," replied Torp.

Nora felt her heart beat violently, but her agitation subsided as he continued:

"I need scarcely say that I allude to Waldemar. He has only been a week or ten days free from a sort of tacit engagement that has existed for a long time between him and the Countess Schaumberg, and now fears that the reserve which he was obliged to observe at the commencement of his acquaintance with you, may have prejudiced you against him. In short, to speak plainly, he thinks that appearances may lead you to suppose that he avoided a declaration of his regard, until he had ascertained the amount of your fortune."

"Are you making a proposal of marriage for your friend?" asked Nora, with forced composure.

"No," answered Torp, "he is ignorant of my intentions to speak to you about him, but I think it necessary to do so as a sort of expiation for the injudicious advice that I gave him some time ago. Supposing you the daughter of Gilbert Nixon, I not only told him that your fortune would not be sufficient to make his father overlook your want of rank, but tried to prejudice him against your relations, and even yourself, completing my absurd interference by using all my influence to induce him to return to his family, with whom I knew the Countess Schaumberg was then staying. I hope," he added, with heightened colour, "I hope you understand the motives that have induced me to enter into this explanation, and make a confession which, I am quite aware, will not increase your regard for me."

"It will not lessen it," replied Nora, "for chance has already made me aware of almost all you have told me."

"Then you were not prejudiced against him."

"Not in the least."

"Yet he complains of increasing reserve on your part during the last ten days — that is, precisely since he has been at liberty to let you perceive his intentions: your preference for him has, however, on all occasions, been so evident, that I think he must be mistaken."

"He was not mistaken," said Nora.

Torp looked at her eagerly, inquiringly, but, to his infinite chagrin, perceived her eyes fixed on Seppel and Rosel, as they just then descended from the chapel.

"Have you prayed for me as you promised, Rosel?" she asked, advancing to meet her.

"That I have!" answered Rosel. "I prayed that you might be as happy as you deserve to be."

"Choose another form of prayer next time, dear girl," rejoined Nora, "for I have been happy beyond my deserts all my life."

"Miss Nora," interposed Seppel, a little shyly, but with a beaming countenance, "I prayed for you too, and with all my heart, that you might be as happy — as you have made us."

"Thank you," said Nora, with a cordial smile; "to judge by your face at this moment, my portion of happiness would in that case be no common one."

"Are you going, Leonora?" asked Torp, perceiving her begin to walk away with them.

"Are you coming?" she asked in return, waiting until he had joined her at the gate of the enclosure.

Torp stopped there, and said resolutely: "We were speaking of Waldemar, Leonora, and I feel bound to tell you what a good-hearted, excellent sort of fellow he is."

Nora would have been annoyed, perhaps even irritated, at his cool, business-like manner, had she not felt convinced that he considered himself to be fulfilling a solemn act of expiation. The absurdity of their mutual position struck her, however, so forcibly, that she had some difficulty in keeping her countenance as she replied, "that she had never doubted Count Waldemar's excellent qualities."

"You are also aware of his present position and splendid prospects?"

"Perfectly."

"Then may I ask the cause of the reserve of which he speaks so despondingly?"

"You may not," she answered, abruptly.

Torp opened the gate — he looked very grave, almost offended; and unwilling that they should part in anger, she observed, as they walked towards the sexton's, "that having heard from the forester of Count Waldemar's engagement to Irene Schaumberg, she had never thought of him otherwise than as the future husband of her former friend."

"Ah!" said Torp, "I understand — it was the constraint of a new position."

"There was no constraint," said Nora, and then they walked on in silence to the house, where they found Waldemar established, with his drawing materials before him, on the rough planks that formed a table.

Perhaps it was the desire to prove the absence of the supposed restraint, that induced her to sit down near

Waldemar, and examine a drawing that he had just made of the Riven Rock. He took from his pouch the portfolio she had examined at the forest-house and so much wished to possess, and with playful ostentation began to place the various sketches and drawings before her.

"Will you buy them?" he asked, gaily.

"Most willingly. Name your price."

"Answered like a rich Englishwoman," said Waldemar; "but they are not to be had for gold. I believe," he added, while he leaned his chin on the top of his pencil, "I believe I once before mentioned that they were to be had for a cup of coffee."

"Seriously spoken?" asked Nora.

"Most seriously, — but this coffee must be made by your fair hands, and brought to me by yourself; nay, to make the enjoyment complete, I must also request you to sit by me while I drink it!"

"What an odd idea!" exclaimed Nora. "You had better take into consideration, that coffee made by me will scarcely be particularly good."

"That is of no consequence whatever," said Waldemar, quickly. "You have taken a fancy to my sketches, and I have taken a fancy to drink coffee made by an Englishwoman."

"If you had said tea —" began Nora.

"Perhaps I should if I had been an Englishman, and my drawings of people and places in England; but, for a German, and for alpine sketches, you must, yourself, allow that coffee is more appropriate."

"A cup of coffee seems to me so altogether inappropriate," said Nora, "that I cannot help thinking that more is meant than meets the ear."

"You cannot imagine the supreme pleasure which a cup of coffee, made by you, would give me!"

"Not in the least. You must have some hidden motive, or —" At this moment she turned towards Torp. He was endeavouring to look indifferent with all his might; but his face was unusually flushed as he bent over the sketches in question. Nora hesitated for a moment, looked from one to the other, and then added, slowly, "There is something here that I do not understand, — under such circumstances, I — decline making the coffee."

"Torp," cried Waldemar, half laughing, "your jealous face has spoiled all!"

"Jealous!" repeated Torp; "not at all. Time enough for that when you have got the coffee."

"Just take yourself off, will you, and let me try my powers of persuasion alone."

Torp made a lazy movement, as if about to obey this command.

"Stay," cried Nora. "I now insist on knowing what you both mean."

Torp stayed, but remained silent. Waldemar closed his drawing-book. "My sketches, it seems, are not considered worth even a cup of bad coffee," he said, beginning to replace them in the portfolio; "however, I can patiently bear the mortification — for the contemplation of them will, I hope, often afford me pleasure when drinking a cup of good!"

"Then," said Nora, frankly, "then you have not, as I began to suppose, made me the subject of a wager."

It was now Waldemar's turn to blush. Nora looked in vain to Torp for explanation, — he was apparently absorbed in the contents of the portfolio. The silence of both naturally confirmed her suspicions — and she turned, with an air of displeasure, to Waldemar, while she said, "Most willingly would I have tried to make coffee for you, had it been merely to gratify an eccentric wish, but to find myself the subject of a wager, is so far from agreeable, that I shall certainly not assist you to win it. You have lost — whatever it may be."

"I have lost more than my wager, if I cannot persuade you to gratify this wish of mine," said Waldemar, gravely. "When I now repeat my request, it is not to gain a wager, which I cannot deny having made with Torp the day after I first saw you. I desire your compliance now as a special mark of your favour, or rather as a sign that you like me better than your cousin and countryman here! The drawings are yours, at all events; for, if you refuse my request, after what I have just said, they will hereafter be a source of more pain than pleasure to me."

"This is absurd," cried Nora, rising, and greatly annoyed at the increasing seriousness of both her companions. "Surely," she added, appealing to Torp, "surely *you* do not mean to embarrass me, by attaching importance to what I may do on this occasion?"

Now Torp was, at the moment, looking at Waldemar's sketch of Nora as she sat at the woodman's fountain; he moved it, so that she could recognise her portrait; and he was convinced she did so instantly — for she grew very pale; and, as if to change the current of his thoughts, covered it hastily with the beautifully-

finished drawing of the Kerbstein lake and fisher-house, that she happened, at the moment, to have in her hand. Her confusion was, however, boundless, when she perceived that Torp understood her as if she had spoken, and said more — much more — than she had ventured to think at the moment; for he leaned forward, and, looking up, said, with a significance that was not to be mistaken, "Make the coffee for him, Nora, and you will confer a favour on me, too!"

"Confound you," cried Waldemar, springing up with undisguised annoyance; "this is what may be called turning the tables with a vengeance. Coffee made at his command, Mees Nixone, would be so little what I hoped to receive from you, that I prefer, this time, some of that which the sexton's wife has probably made for us all."

He walked towards the house as he spoke, but stopped, when sufficiently within it, to enable him to look back unperceived. He saw Torp stretch his hand across the table to Nora — saw hers extended in return; there was no perceptible movement of Torp's lips; his face, however, was eloquent enough, though seen but for a moment before he bent his head over the hand he held fast in both of his. Not one word had been spoken.

"For, it is with feelings as with waters —
The shallow murmur, but the deep are dumb."

"So," muttered Waldemar, to whom this pantomime had been painfully intelligible, "so I have lost her as well as my wager. She does not know how much I love her — nor Torp either, — and they never shall

know. It will be very odd if I cannot dissemble for the four-and-twenty hours we shall still be together." And he returned to them, soon afterwards, apparently as gay as ever; and, during their return to the village, might have been supposed the happiest of the party!

THE END.

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